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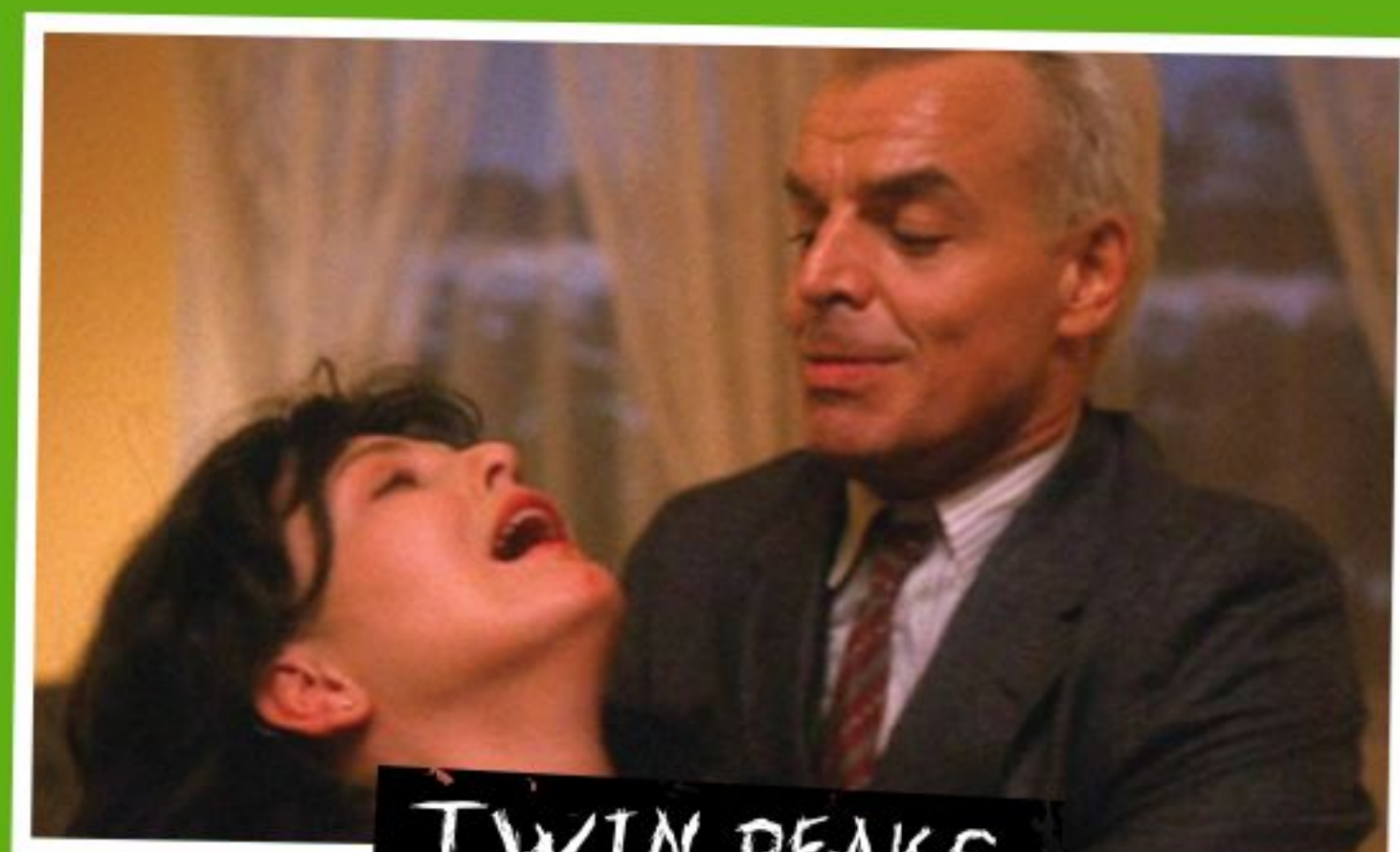
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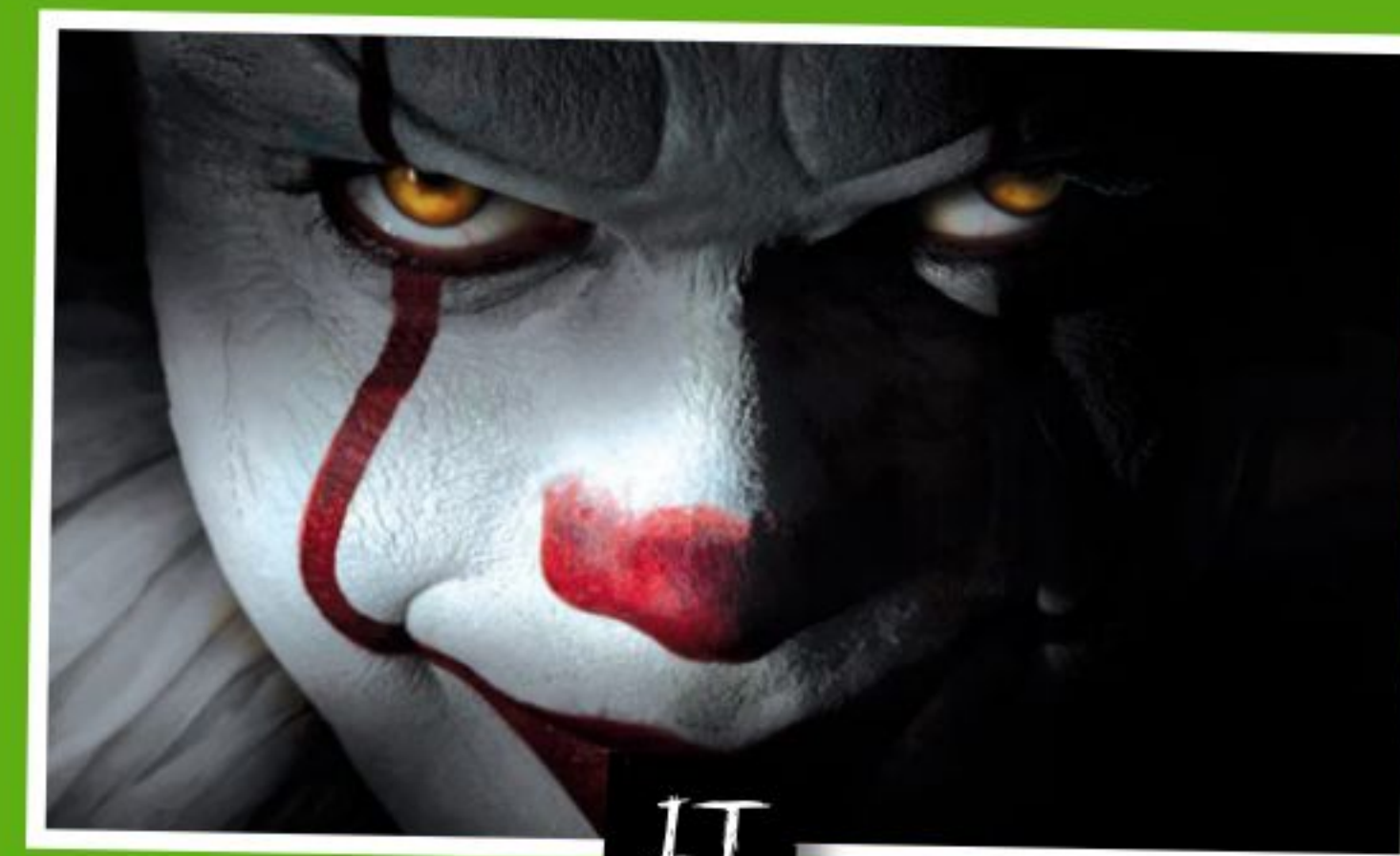
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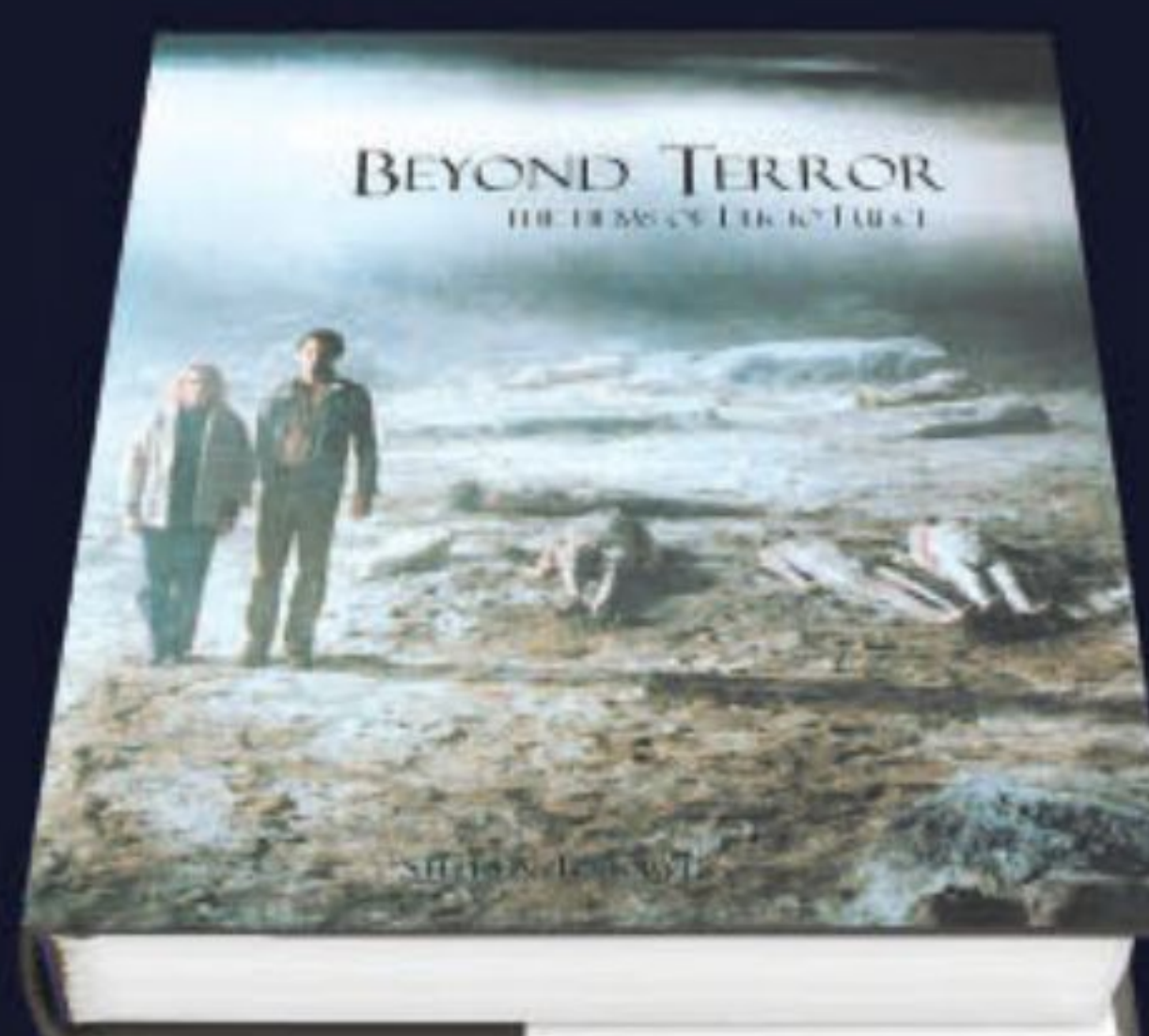
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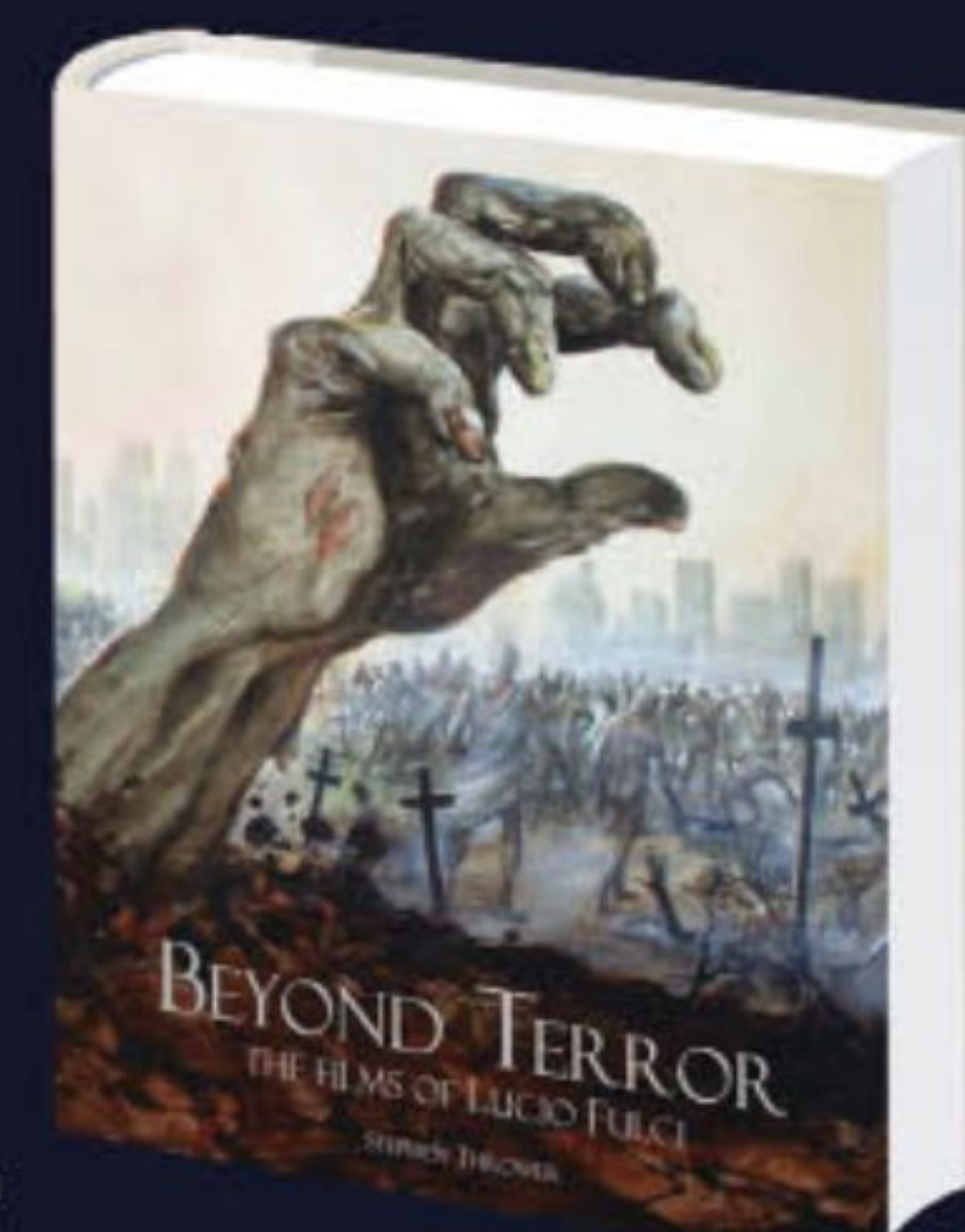
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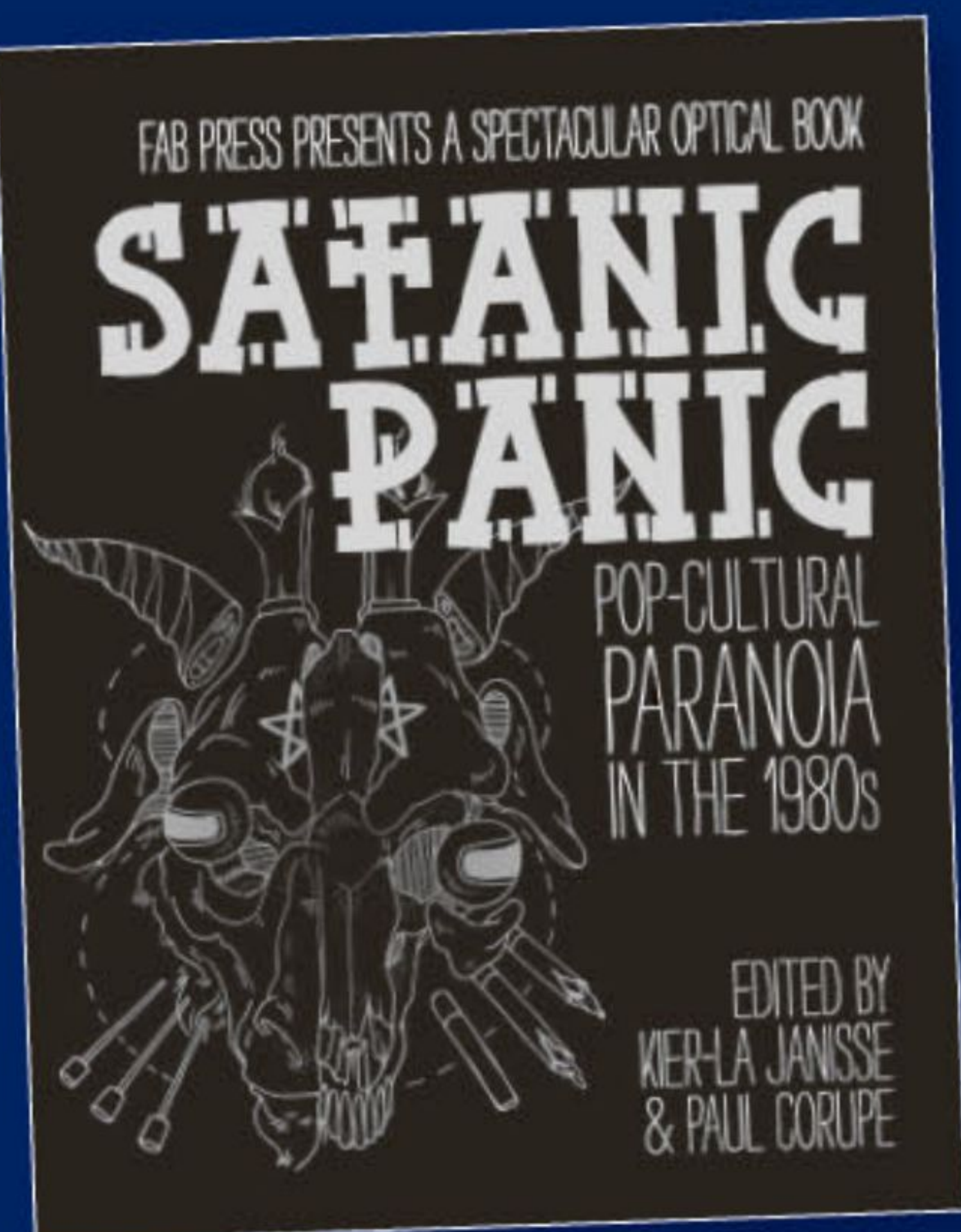


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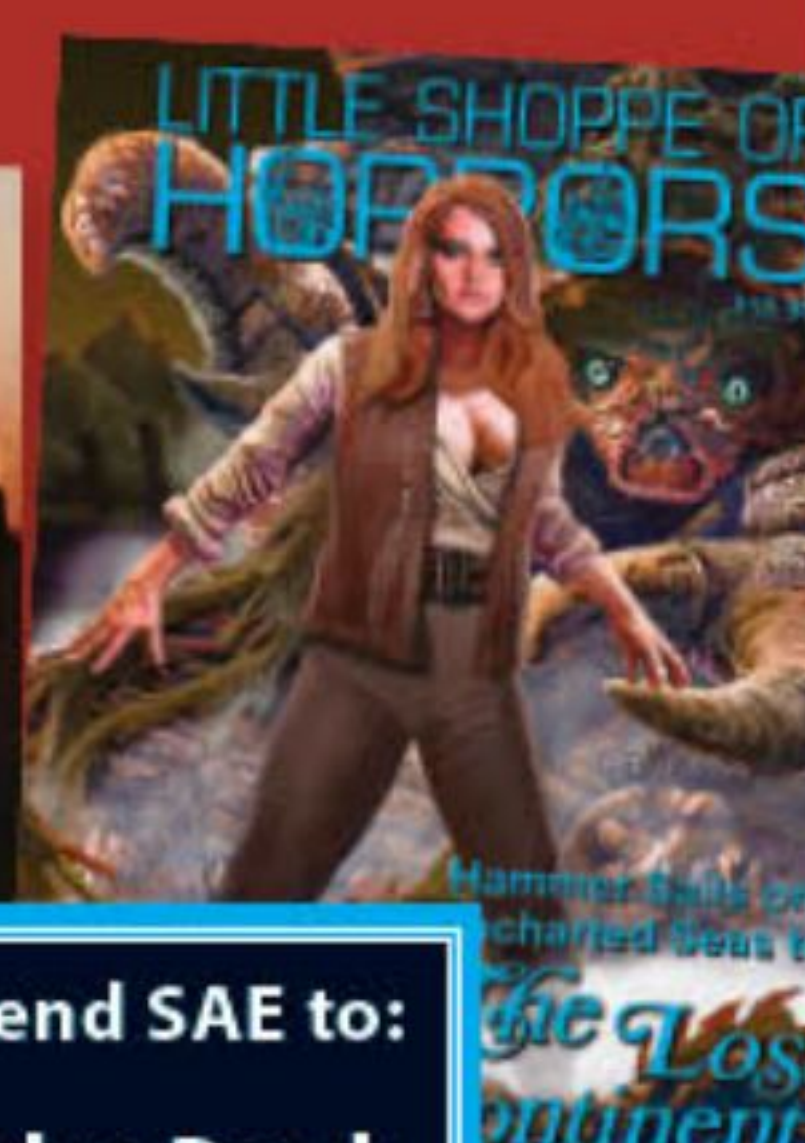
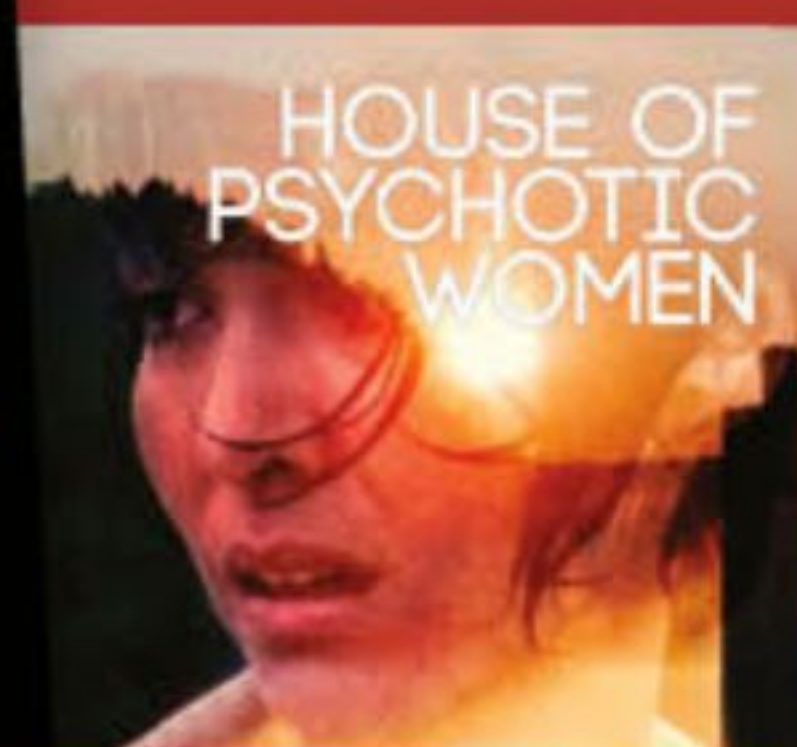
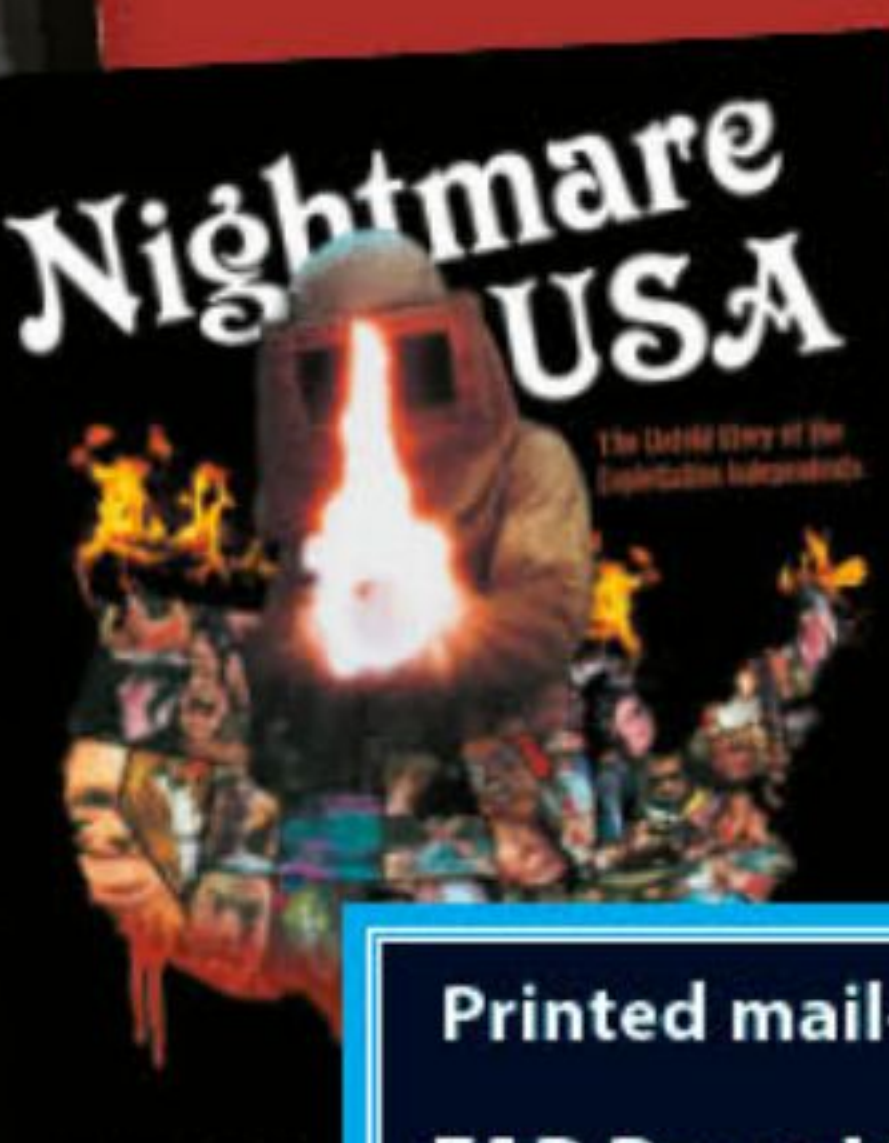
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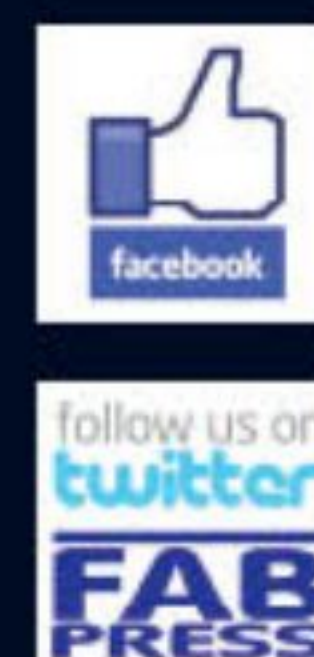
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HORRORVILLE

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'I Get Wet' by Andrew WK, an almost certainly unhealthy amount of caffeine-ridden beverages, flashbacks of being thrown in the deep end without any armbands, numerous Spotify rock ballad playlists

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EDITOR'S PICK
BERNIE WRIGHTSON
REMEMBERED
ON P76

I

t is often the case that the horror genre sits on the margins of popular culture – a feared and perennially misunderstood realm that viewers dread to tread.

When it does enter the mainstream, however, it stays for good, slipping its tendrils into the public consciousness in a manner that would surely make Cthulhu Himself nod His maw in unspoken approval. We are, of course, referring to the global phenomenon that is *Stranger Things*.

Sure, it may straddle Amblin-era Spielberg, but it's the horror elements that rise to the fore – whether it be the Stephen King-inspired gang of young heroes, the Lovecraftian atmosphere of the *Upside Down*, or the Demogorgon, ripped straight from the heart of a *Dungeons & Dragons* board. With Season Two up ahead, we run over everything we know about Eleven and co's comeback.

But rest assured, we have our regular outpouring of ominous film and TV output here too. Whether it's one-on-ones with Katherine Waterston and Michael Fassbender, stars of the frankly terrifying-looking *Alien: Covenant*; our on-set preview of new series *Midnight, Texas*, or interviews with scare icons like Ruggero Deodato and Madeline Smith, there is plenty of fear to go around.

On a separate note, this is my first issue with **Horrorville**, and I couldn't be more proud for the opportunity to champion a genre that has always been close to my heart. I hope this comes across.

Issue 5 will be unleashed on the world on 22 August. Until then, I'll be away dusting off my 'Where's Barb?' sign...

Steve

Steve Wright, Editor

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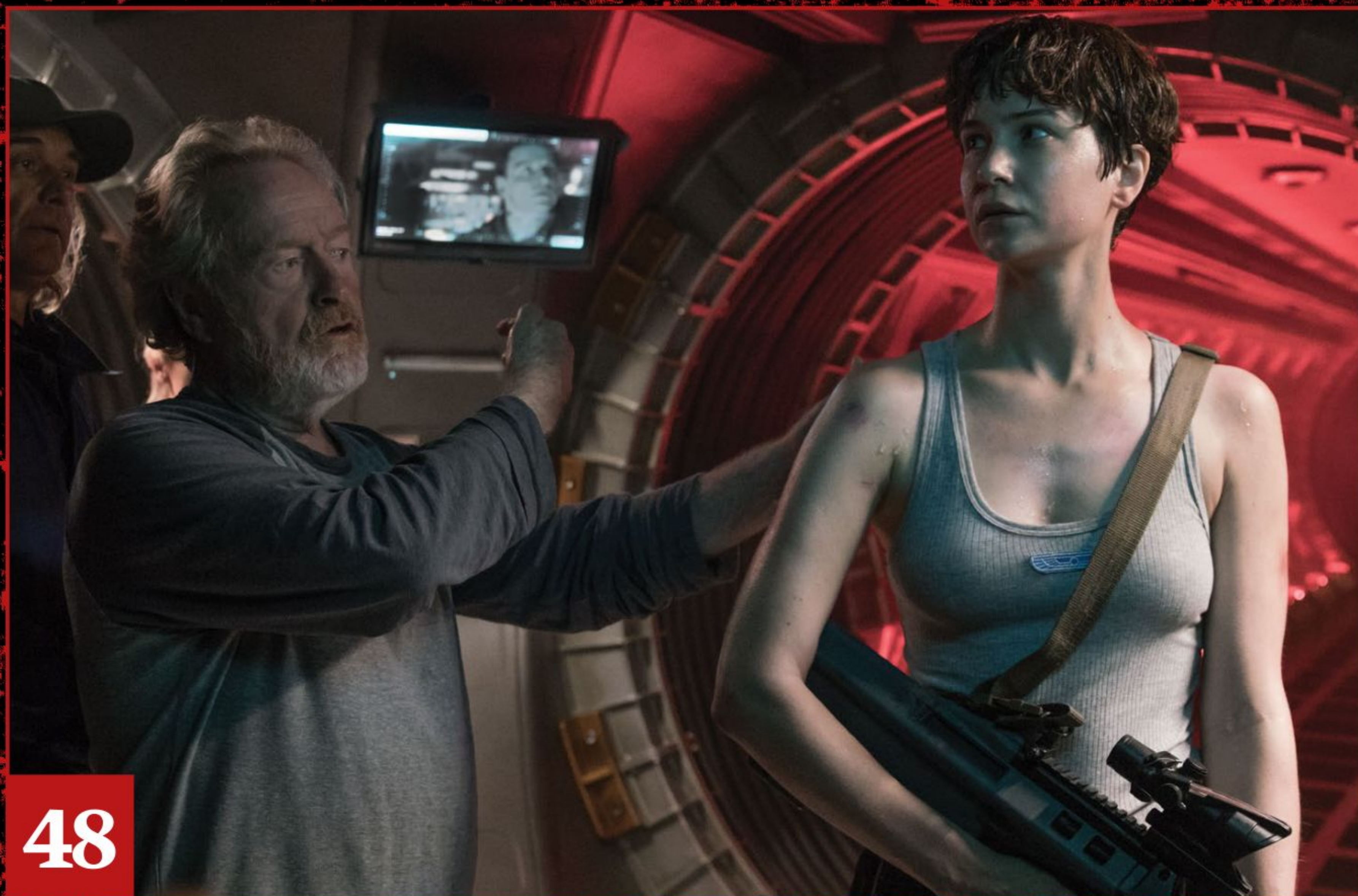
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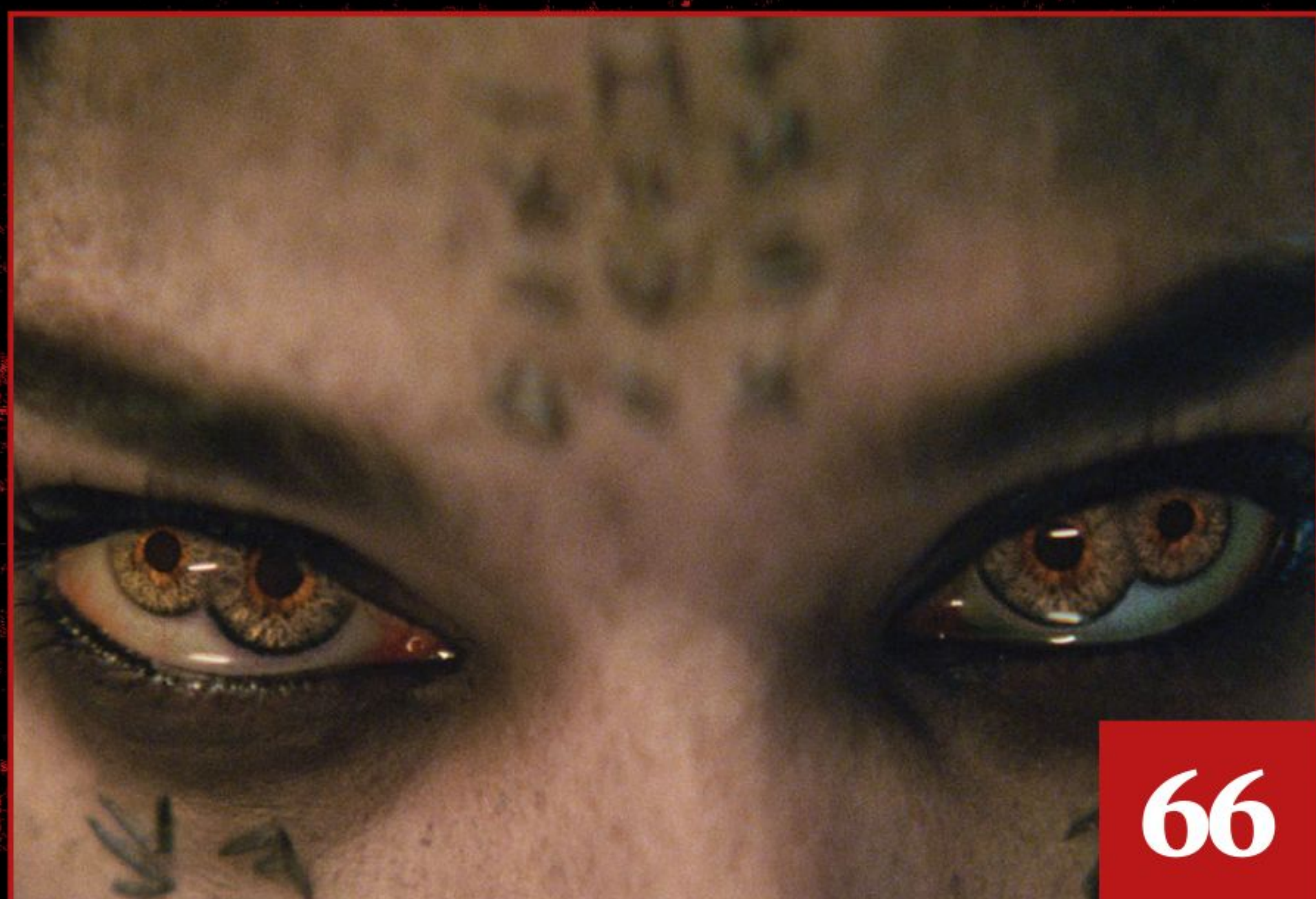
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Rick and Morgan
teamed up once more in
the Season Seven finale

ALL-OUT WAR

We look ahead at what's in store for Season Eight of The Walking Dead

Another April has crawled by, and with it another year of *The Walking Dead*, with Season Seven finale 'The First Day Of The Rest Of Your Life' closing things off in fittingly blood-drenched fashion. Ratings may not be quite what they once were, but it remains event television of the highest order, and a constant topic of water-cooler chat. Whatever your thoughts on the season, it's hard to deny that the closing episode did its job: rounding things off in style, while inserting an ominous portent of what's to come.

With Rick's group seemingly down and out after the not-so-surprising betrayal of Jadis and her Scavengers, it took the self-sacrifice of Sasha (Sonequa Martin-Green) to save the day. Her demise didn't exactly come as a surprise, considering we all knew she was off to travel the galaxy in *Star Trek: Discovery*, so it was good to see her bow out in a manner that actually seemed to mean something – which is more than we can say for Glenn and Abraham. RIP.

But what does this all mean? In short, as Negan made not-so ambiguous in front of his intimidatingly huge crowd of followers, the Savivors are off to war – and combining their numbers with the Scavengers, they will be a threat indeed. The arc in the comics that follows this storyline is fittingly titled 'All-Out War', and we can't help but suspect that Season Eight will roll along in a similar vein.

Even so, they'll have a battle on their hands. All the good guys are united once again, with the good folk from the Hilltop (minus Gregory – we have no idea where he has slithered off to), and Ezekiel's Kingdom finally getting their act together to join the fight, complete with a CGI-tastic Shiva the man-eating tiger. One of our big quibbles of Season Seven was not enough of the King, and the transparent lack of tiger. Admittedly, CGI animals haven't traditionally been the show's strong point (the less said about *that* CGI deer, the better), but you can't go wrong with a carnivorous predator.

Showrunner Scott Gimple teased more of the same in an interview with *TV Line*, saying of

Season Eight: "Now that [the various factions] are in public conflict and everything is on the table as far as everybody knows who everybody is to each other and what's going on, the narrative changes a lot. It's going to become a bit more kinetic and fast-moving, because that's where the story is going. The content is definitely going to be determining the form."

But beyond then, what? It seems safe to assume that the next season or two will be taken up by conflict. After that, there could be major changes in store. In the comics, following the two 'All-Out War' volumes, creator Robert Kirkman elected to jump forward in time by two years, showing the

**"IT'S GOING TO BECOME
MORE KINETIC AND FAST-
MOVING... THAT'S WHERE
THE STORY'S GOING"**



It was sad;y the final appearance from Sasha...



...but she didn't go down without a bite

conflict's aftermath. We won't spoil what happens in case you happen to be unfamiliar with the source material, but it's safe to say a lot's changed. In the past, the show's creators have been open with how long they envisage it lasting for – soundbites alluding to Seasons 11 and 12 have been produced, taking it well into *Supernatural* territory – so it makes sense that they're thinking ahead.

Rather surprisingly, in terms of cliffhangers, there weren't too many. Thankfully, it abandoned its increasingly annoying tendency to finish seasons with episodes that would, in any other show, have made for more effective season premieres, tying things up in a strangely neat bow.

Even so, there are questions that need to be addressed, namely exactly whose side is Eugene on? Disarmingly frank about his own cowardice and loyalty to Negan – to the point where even the Alexandrians seem convinced of his betrayal – he appears to have cast all that in

doubt by his giving of the suicide pill to Sasha, therefore facilitating the assault on Negan that destabilised the Savivors' offensive. While he provided Negan with a plausible explanation for her demise while en route in the coffin, we doubt he's fooling him. Expect further tests of his loyalty in Season Eight that might put him at direct odds with his former 'friends'.

Aside from that, there are a few other bugbears we have in mind: exactly where did Gregory get to when he fled the Hilltop, and what will he do with the knowledge he has of its defences? And what happened to Heath? We really hope the show hasn't just forgotten about him, as we actually quite liked the guy. And when will Dwight actually make up his mind and switch sides? These are all questions that need to be answered. Later, Dead heads...

The Walking Dead: Season Eight will air on Fox later in 2017.

IN MEMORANDUM

In Season Seven we said goodbye to...



Glenn



Abraham



Olivia



Spencer



Emmett



Benjamin



Sasha



STEVE ORAM

Having turned the screen blood-red in *Sightseers*, the newly anointed genre favourite talks to **Matthew Turner** about his new movie, *A Dark Song*, and how John Landis inspired his love of horror...

Your character in *A Dark Song* is an occultist, but he's also very far from what we traditionally think of as a 'Master of the Dark Arts' type. How much input did you have into the character?

Solomon was a very well-written character on the page, but my input was to make him very real. Liam [Gavin], the director, cast me because he thought that I could probably do that, and my thing was to play it real, not like a mystical hero, just a very ordinary guy who's a bit of a bully. I based him on the sort of people you might meet in a weird pub, some intense bloke you might get talking to in a pub and think, "Oh God, this is a bit weird", but also kind of normal.

Have you always been drawn to horror?

I have, yes. As a kid, they were the two things that I loved the most: horror and comedy. They're both similar, working on similar principles, in that you need to get a physical reaction out of the audience, which I've always loved. *An American Werewolf In London* was a massive film for me as a kid – it just totally nailed both things. So I've always been drawn to it. In AAAAAAAH!, the film I directed, we brought loads of elements of horror and comedy, and I hope it had a cross-appeal to the horror people.

So was that mix of horror and comedy the driving force behind *Sightseers* as well?

It was, yeah. We were interested in that from the start, really. *Sightseers* had its roots in comedy and doing the live characters in the stage show Alice [Lowe] and I did. I think [director Ben Wheatley] brought a lot of the gore to it, but we'd always been interested in juxtaposing normal people with absolutely horrific acts. It sort of made us laugh, but it also made us feel uncomfortable. That seems to be one of the themes of my work!

Do you remember the first film that scared you when you were a kid?

American Werewolf would be the big one for me, and I loved *Island Of Lost Souls* as well – that's one of my big favourites. I couldn't believe that was unfolding in front of my eyes when I watched it. It was kind of ahead of its time. There's been a lot of films with similar themes and a couple of remakes, but I don't think it's ever been equalled, that creation of the world and the characters within it – just incredible and never bettered. Charles Laughton is just amazing in it, that whole performance! It's funny as well, I think. I could watch that all day, what he's doing there.

Do you plan to direct again at some point?

Yes. We're working on the next film, trying to get that together. It's called *Dregs*, and it's a period drama about some very rebellious housemaids in a country house – it's like *Downton Abbey* gone wrong. It's not a horror film, per se, although there are elements of gore and nastiness within it that might appeal to genre fans. It's a comedy with loads of my friends in it.

Read our review of *A Dark Song* on page 102.





THE MIST REVISITED

The creative minds behind the latest Stephen King remake give us the lowdown

Stephen King's 1980 novella, *The Mist*, focuses on a quaint town engulfed by an ominous fog chockfull of grotesque creatures. Frank Darabont then directed a big-screen adaptation in 2007. A decade later, Spike TV will give it the small-screen treatment with a ten-episode season premiering on June 22. Executive producer Christian Torpe promises the series won't simply rehash previous incarnations, but rather will provide plenty of twists on the source material.

"We sort of decided to reimagine *The Mist*, to take the heart of the story – the setup, the metaphor of the mist, and how people react when they are blinded by fear – and then take it from there," Torpe says. "I wanted to pay homage to the original story by constantly referencing it."

The show kicks off leading up to the mist's arrival. Torpe believes viewers will be surprised by how character-driven this tale of terror comes across.

"In a standard pilot, you would have the mist arriving by the end of the very first act," reports Torpe. "We don't have that. We spent quite a lot of time on our characters and establishing them and their conflicts and personal relationships."

Extreme tension escalates between residents as they attempt to survive the phenomena. The pressure-cooker situation quickly brings out the best in a number of

people. And, not surprisingly, it also brings out the worst in others. "When you hit that red zone, when that fear is at peak level, you can do one of two things," Torpe offers. "You can give into it or you can persevere. That's what these characters do when they are pushed to their limits. Some will give into their fears, and some will rise to the occasion, and some will redefine themselves as human beings. The opposite of fear is hope, and you can play with both those elements in various ways."

Both the book and the film versions of *The Mist* unfolded in one confined location, a supermarket. The TV series honors that setting, but takes it in a different direction. The major storyline in season one takes place in a mall where people are trapped.

"There's a lot more possibilities and people," explains Torpe. "We get to create a miniature society. Then, we have other locations throughout the series. We have a church. We have some people at a police station. We have some people traveling through the mist. The idea was to create these little parallel societies and see how they would develop depending on whether they were in a mall, church or some other place. At a certain point, these stories dovetail and turn into one story."

One bone of contention among King fans revolves around the climatic finale. Darabont's movie went a darker route than the novella, and culminated with the death of many main characters. As for how the TV series addresses the ending – that remains up in the air. "*The Mist* has been developed as an ongoing series," Torpe concludes. "We hope to continue into Season Two. As for the ending, it's certainly one of the places where we correspond with both the movie and the book. I don't think I can say any more than that."

The Mist will premiere on Spike on 22 June.

"THE IDEA WAS TO CREATE THESE PARALLEL SOCIETIES AND SEE HOW THEY DEVELOP"

SHALLOW CUTS

Monster Charity Project 2017

28 of the UK's top sculpting and SFX artists will raise money for the Make-A-Wish Foundation as part of a competition to customise a sculpt of Frankenstein's Monster's head, to be auctioned from 31 October. Follow their progress at twitter.com/monsterproj.

Captain Kronos Returns

Following the success of Peter Milligan and Ronilson Freire's *The Mummy: Palimpsest* back in November, Captain Kronos is the next horror icon to be committed to the panels for Titan's *Hammer* line. Dan Abnett and Tom Mandrake will team up for the new adventures of the vampire hunter.

Are you hungry for more *Santa Clarita Diet*?

If the answer to the above is 'yes', then you're in luck, as Netflix has officially renewed the Drew Barrymore and Timothy Olyphant-starring horror drama for a second season.

Sleeping Beauties Awakens

Yet another Stephen King novel is making its way to the screen, with *Sleeping Beauties* – co-authored with his son Owen and due to be released in September – having been picked up by production company Anonymous Content. Depicting a future in which women sleep in cocoons, going feral when disturbed.



TRAILER BREAKDOWN: **IT**

We peer beneath the surface of the first footage from Andrés Muschietti's feature-length adaptation of Stephen King's most terrifying novel...



➔ **Careful, you could lose an arm...**
The opening to the miniseries remains, in which young Georgie encounters Pennywise.



➔ **Meet the Losers Club**
The novel and miniseries started in the Sixties, but here the action takes place in the Eighties.



➔ **Where is everyone?**
It looks like the film will draw on the novel's atmosphere, where missing kids are a fact of life.



➔ **The Red Balloon**
If you've watched the series, you will know what's coming when the balloon pops.



➔ **Into the sewers**
The gang venture into the sewers ahead of what will likely be the climatic showdown.



➔ **Super 8 time**
Rather than via a book, here the gang discover the history of Derry via wide-screen projector...



➔ **Here's Pennywise!**
...where IT gradually appears in the guise of Bill's (Jaeden Lieberher) mother.



➔ **Run!**
In the book, IT takes the form of a werewolf - hard to tell whether that's the case here.



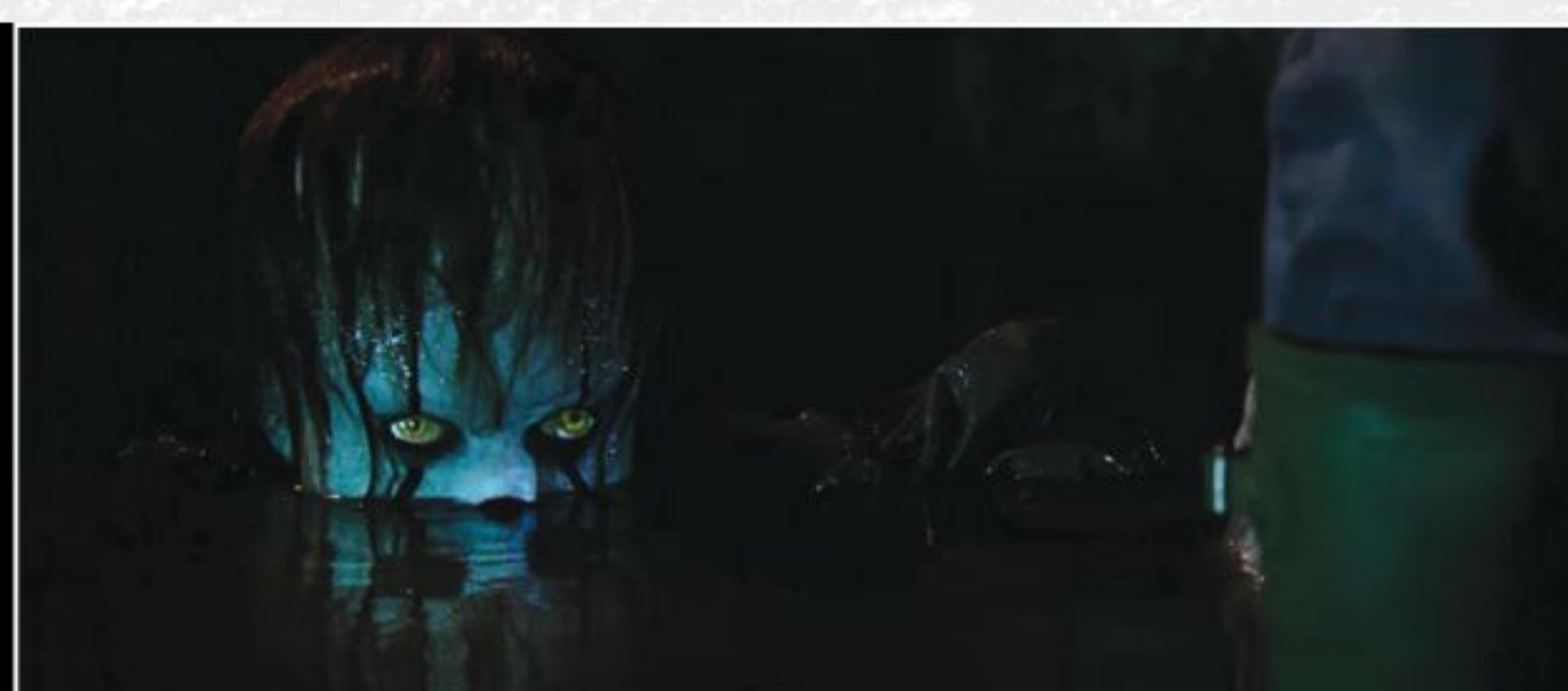
➔ **Demons of the past**
Another scene from the book, IT torments Mike (Chosen Jacobs) with Derry's horrible past.



➔ **Sinkhole drama**
Beverly (Sophia Lillis) gets a soaking from blood spurting at her through her sink.



➔ **"You'll float too!"**
The deceased 'George' scares the crap out of his brother (and us) with his depraved screams.



➔ **Pennywise revisited**
The best look at Pennywise's face we get. Okay, that's far enough. We're scared now.

IT will be released in cinemas on 8 September, distributed by Warner Bros.

BILL PAXTON 1955 – 2017

Paying tribute to the charismatic character actor



Bill Paxton –
Horrorville salutes you.
Rest in peace sir.

Film fans and industry folk alike mourned the passing of one of Hollywood's most magnetic performers, Bill Paxton, aged 61.

Appearing in a raft of big-budget blockbusters throughout his prolific career, such as *True Lies* and *Titanic*, he is known primarily among the horror fraternity for

his quirky turns in genre classics such as *Aliens* and Kathryn Bigelow's vampiric masterpiece, *Near Dark*. An early role as a street punk in James Cameron's break-

through hit *The Terminator* proved significant for two reasons. Firstly, it highlighted the manic energy and compelling screen allure that would go on to earn him recognition and plaudits throughout his career. Secondly, it was the first step in a rare distinction – shared with Lance Henriksen – as one of only two actors to be killed on screen by a Terminator, a Predator, and an Alien.

Paxton made classic movie quote history in his role as the jumpy Private Hudson in Cameron's gun-toting Xenomorph sequel. His cowardly character's hysterical yelping of, "Game over man! Game over!" became enshrined in cult and horror circles, neatly encapsulating the actor's talent for turning standard scripts into performance gold.

The actor and occasional director's captivating presence would often help elevate the material he was given. His turn as the youthful, wisecracking Detective Lambert in the gore-soaked ultra-violence of action sequel *Predator 2* brought welcome comic relief to a film badly in need of some. 🍷

SHALLOW CUTS

Inside No 9 4.0

We are pleased to report that Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith's horror tinged anthology series will return for a fourth season. Its cast this time includes Zoë Wanamaker (*Harry Potter*), Nigel Planer (*The Young Ones*), Noel Clarke (*Kidulthood*), Kevin Eldon (*Dead Set*) and Rory Kinnear (*Penny Dreadful*).

Netflix goes a-haunting

Shirley Jackson's classic novel *The Haunting Of Hill House* is getting another adaptation – this time via streaming rather than the big screen. Excitingly, Mike Flanagan (*Oculus*) is down to write, direct and produce.

Penny Dreadful reborn

Curious about what's next for TV's most underrated Gothic drama? The story will continue in comic-book form, with Volume 1 (written by Krysty Wilson-Cairns and Andrew Hindraker and drawn by Louie De Martinis) out now through Titan.

Get your Freakshift on

We couldn't be more excited for *Freakshift*, the next film from Ben Wheatley and Amy Jump, described as an "action thriller about a band of misfit cops who hunt down and kill nocturnal underground monsters." Armie Hammer and Alicia Vikander have already signed up.

LAND OF THE DEAD

Z Nation's Keith Allan tells Michael Simpson why Season Four won't be the end of the world as we know it

It's the apocalypse, man. None of this shit makes sense," says Doc (Russell Hodgkinson), one of the lead characters in *Z Nation*, shortly before the end of the zombie apocalypse series' Season Three finale.

It's an apt statement not only in the context of the episode, but also for describing the show itself. In a TV landscape littered with dramas about the end of the world, *Z Nation* has found a niche because it doesn't only focus on doom and gloom.

"We tip our hat to those that have come before us, but we have a little more fun than shows like *The Walking Dead*," Horrorville hears from Keith Allan, who plays Murphy. "The audience really responds to that. I hear it so often from people who enjoy the show. They just love how silly we get."

Striking a balance between drama and comedy is difficult, but *Z Nation* pulls it off because of the cast's chemistry, according to Allan. He also praises the crew for delivering on even the daftest-sounding ideas. "You read some of this stuff in the script, and you think, 'Oh my God, that is gonna be stupid'. Then you see it and you're pleasantly surprised."

For The Asylum, the production company behind *Z Nation* and the *Sharknado* films, this approach has paid off. *Z Nation* is one of the highest-rated scripted shows on Syfy in the US. Hence, the channel has now ordered a fourth season. This will allow the writers to resolve the Season Three cliffhanger, in which half of the characters jumped off a cliff and the remainder were zapped by a futuristic plane. Where that leads is anyone's guess, though, so the message from Allan is to expect the unexpected.

"It's a fun ride, and you never know what you're going to get."

Season Four of Z Nation is expected to air on Syfy in the US later this year. The first three seasons were shown on Pick TV in the UK. 🍷



PAST TENSE

Author Paul Kane tells Stephen Jewell about bridging the centuries in his new novel, *Before*

Describing himself as “a bit of a workaholic”, Paul Kane would have to be one of the most prolific horror authors around today. With over 70 books to his name, the Chesterfield resident is now set to release his most ambitious and personal offering yet. The recipient of comparisons to David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*, *Before* features several protagonists battling a common foe over different time periods.



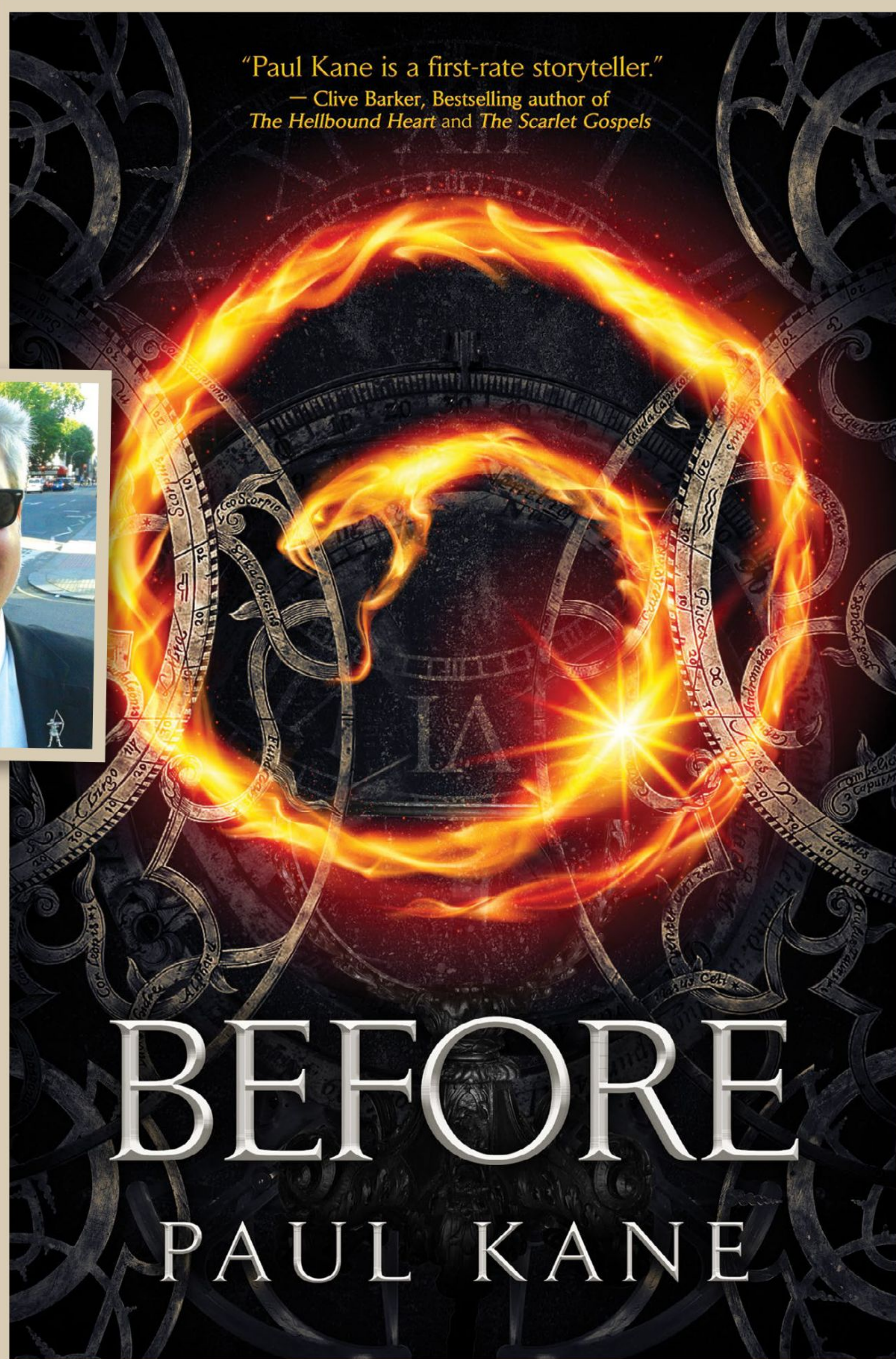
“It’s a huge story with a massive scope, dealing with history, humanity and where we might be going as a species by using the framework of past lives and, in part, a road movie-style chase thriller to do that,” says Kane, who also cites Clive Barker’s *The Damnation Game* and *The Great And Secret Show* and Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods* as significant touchstones. “In the same way they blend fantasy, horror and thriller elements, *Before* is a distinctive mixture of those genres. Of course, the subjects and topics it’s addressing are the real mind-bending elements of the book, in particular some of the revelations at the end.”

Comparing it to “the butterfly flapping its wings theory,” *Before* takes place at some significant turning points, including the Great Fire of London and the Vietnam War. “Some of them are very important to the overall history of Earth, while with others it may only be a handful of people who are affected,” he explains.

“With the Native American character, Broken Tree, for instance, we tell his story on a personal level, but it also relates to what was happening to his people in the 19th century. People’s lives are set against the backdrop of major developments, so there are links and everything is interconnected, but it all comes down to three people, who are at the centre of this great adventure.”

A college lecturer who experiences gradually worsening hallucinations, Alex Webber seeks out the help of Doctor Ellen Hayward before they both come to the attention of god-like, supernatural being, the Infinity. “He’s hunting them for a mysterious reason. The entire novel is building

“THE ENTIRE NOVEL IS BUILDING TOWARDS THEM COMING TOGETHER”



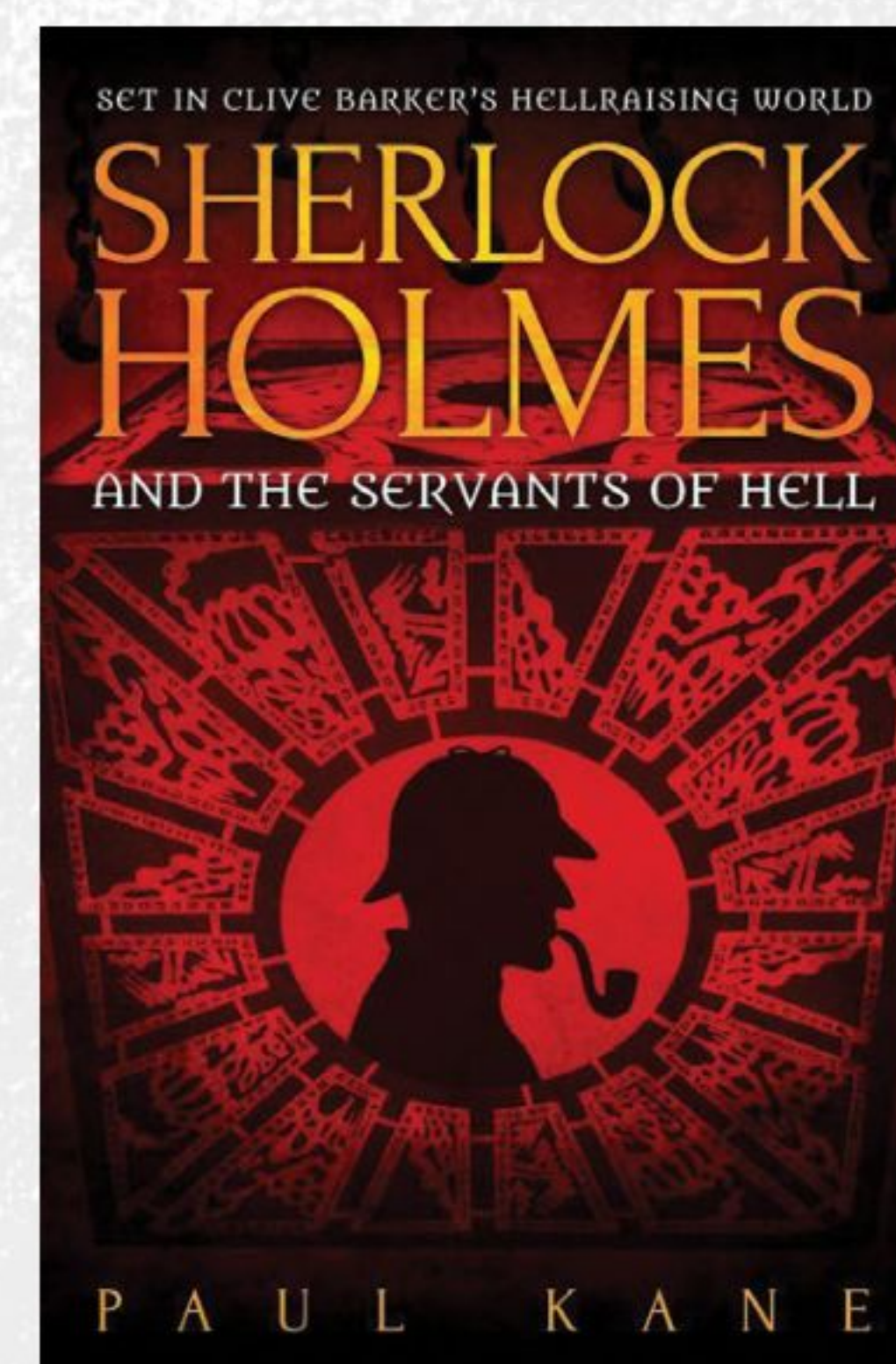
“Paul Kane is a first-rate storyteller.”
— Clive Barker, Bestselling author of *The Hellbound Heart* and *The Scarlet Gospels*

towards them coming together and what happens when they do,” teases Kane. “They’re my favourite characters in the book, but I also have a soft spot for the Infinity’s right-hand man, Peck, who is a sadistic killer with a love of art, [and] the bouncers Terry and Frank, who I describe as ‘monster trucks in the form of human beings’. They work for crime lord Nick Metcalf, who ends up reluctantly helping the Infinity because of his lust for power.”

A long-time associate of Clive Barker, Kane also explored different past milieus when he penned last year’s *Sherlock Holmes And The Servants Of Hell*, which pitted the Great Detective against *Hellraiser*’s sinister, otherworldly demons. “That brought its own problems, not least of which was the fact that I had two mythologies I needed to balance and try to get right,” he reasons. “But I think I more or less pulled it off, and it’s been nice to get reactions from both sets of fans. Some said that I got the characters of Holmes and Watson just right, and others love the brand new Cenobites, and there are a lot in this book!”

Before will be published in June by Grey Matter Press.

ABOVE
Kane’s latest book, *Before*, is set before the Great Fire of London



What's on...

The pick of the best things to do over the next three months

May

Alien: Covenant

What Film

Whether you loved or loathed *Prometheus*, Ridley Scott's follow-up/prequel/whatever is revisiting the formula that made his name, and judging by the reactions to the trailers thus far, he's onto a winner. There are actual Aliens – how can he go wrong? Katherine Waterston, Michael Fassbender, Danny McBride and James Franco star.

Where General theatrical release

When 12 May

The Frighteners: The Complete Series

What DVD

Low-key but still terrifying, 1972 anthology horror series *The Frighteners* is getting a re-release on DVD, and not before time. Starring acclaimed thespians like John Thaw, Ian Holm, Tom Bell, Ian Hendry and Ray Smith, this is sure to get you nostalgic for a more chilling era of TV.

Where General retail release

When 15 May

Triple Six Horror Film Festival

What Film Festival

Taking place across two days, events include a screening and live Q&A with *Hardware* director Richard Stanley, with premieres for the likes of UK horror

documentary *Tone Death*, *The Forest Of*

Lost Souls, *Hounds Of Love* and Roddy Piper's last film, *The Chair*.

Where Great Northern Warehouse, Deansgate, Manchester

When 27-28 May



June

Fear The Walking Dead

What TV

It has been confirmed that Season Three of *Fear*

The Walking Dead will premiere on Monday 5 June in the form of a double episode, being broadcast in a simulcast with the US at 2am, and repeated at 9pm on ABC. So no one need miss out.

Where BT/AMC

When 5 June

The Mummy

What Film

Universal's rebooted monster'verse kicks off in earnest with this reimagining of *The*

Mummy, which sees Tom Cruise leading the attempts to rid the world of the apocalyptic cravings of Princess Ahmanet

(played by *Kingsman*'s Sofia Boutella).

Setting the scene for the shared universe, Russell Crowe stars as Dr Henry Jekyll.

Where General theatrical release

When 9 June

The Bird With The Crystal Plumage

What Blu-ray

Fans of Arrow's sumptuous restorations of horror classics have yet another macabre treat in store, with Dario Argento's debut next in line for a revisitation. Released in 4k in its original 2:35:1 aspect ratio, finally you will see the legendary giallo in the way its maker intended.

Where General retail release

When 19 June



July

Swansea Horror Con

What Film Festival

Wales' foremost fear festival returns for another year, boasting an array of guests that gore hounds will love. Whether it's *Hatchet* star Kane Hodder, Hammer scream queen Caroline Munro or legendary poster artist Graham Humphreys you're most interested in, there will be no shortage of things to do and people to see.

Where Swansea Leisure Complex, Oystermouth Road, Swansea

When 1-2 July

Sherlock Holmes Vs Cthulhu

What Book

Fans of literary crossovers in the vein of Alan Moore's *League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* will find plenty to enjoy in this tale, which sees the world's greatest detective confront unspeakable dread. Described by Christopher Golden as "an irresistible eldritch mystery", we look forward to seeing what Lois Gresh does with the two literary icons.

Where General retail release

When 4 July

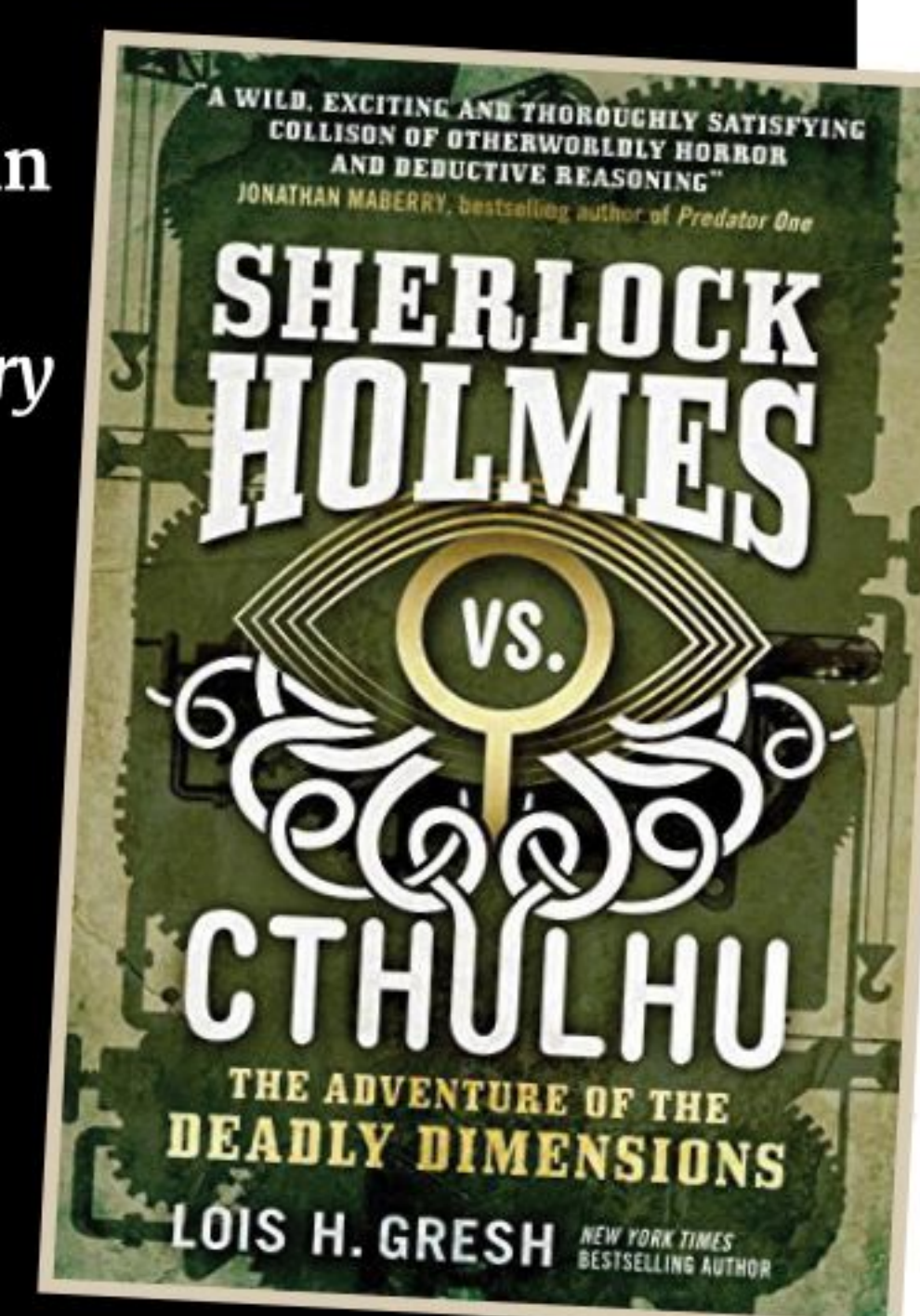
Hounds Of Love

What Film

Ben Young makes his directorial debut in this crime-horror that sees kidnap victim Vicki (Ashleigh Cummings) attempting to drive a wedge between her two captors. In line for a lengthy run on the festival circuit, we can see this becoming a surprise hit.

Where General theatrical release

When 7 July



PREMONITIONS

Previews of the scariest films
and TV coming soon...



WISH UPON

Hellraiser meets The Craft in John R Leonetti's latest feature. **Bryan Cairns** goes one-on-one to talk wish fulfilment with the Annabelle director...

Be careful what you wish for. It's a cautionary, age-old adage that frequently rings true in horror. Set to be released on 14 July in the US, the teen thriller *Wish Upon* finds *The Conjuring's* Joey King playing Clare Shannon, a 17-year-old high-school misfit struggling with life. She stumbled across her mother's suicide 12 years ago, constantly gets bullied at school, and is ignored by her long-time crush. Things haven't been easy for her.

Clare's luck changes when her hoarder father, Jonathan (Ryan Phillippe), presents her with an ancient Chinese music box displaying an inscription that promises its owner seven wishes. However, Clare soon discovers that her heart's desires come with a steep price. Every wish Clare makes results in the people closest to her perishing in ghastly and violent accidents. Unwilling to give up her improved new life, Clare soon runs the risk of being consumed by the box's unholy powers.

"The original box comes from Lumei, who many years ago was the only one who survived this horrific execution of her whole family in a car," explains director John R Leonetti. "They were locked in a car in the heat, and they suffocated. She was the only one who survived. For revenge, she conjured up this demon to enter the box."

"What you come to learn is there are seven wishes that the box grants," Leonetti continues. "But with every wish, there is a ramification and a death. What is interesting about the box, and everyone that has had it,

including Clare, is at first it's like, 'This is kind of cool.' But it almost creates an elixir of desire. It entices people to think about what they desire and then ask for that. What happens is it's not until too late that the elixir has become like heroin, like a drug to Clare, that she now realizes the people around her are dying because of her wishes. By then she's an addict, and can't give it up. Then, how do you deal with it? What do you do?"

Clare's psychological and emotional journey hooked Leonetti. In addition, he responded to how different *Wish Upon* was from *Annabelle*, eliminating any chance of revisiting familiar territory.

CONJURING SCARES

"*Wish Upon* is a fantasy-teen thriller," Leonetti says when asked to categorise it. "At first, I questioned myself if I was the right person for a teen, high-school type of movie. As it turns out, I'm so glad I was. It's so much fun working with this age of actors and people. I'm a kid at heart, too."

"The other thing that really attracted me about it is the fact that it's a dark tale, but it has uplifting characters," he continues. "The plight of Clare is an awesome, layered arc and experience for Joey. I immediately thought of Joey because I worked with her on *The Conjuring*, where I was the director of

DETAILS

RELEASE DATE
TBC

RATING
TBC

DIRECTOR
John R Leonetti

STARRING
Joey King, Ryan Phillippe, Ki Hong Lee, Sherilyn Fenn

"It entices people to think about what they desire, and then ask for that"



photography. I remember her sitting on the bed in the first *Conjuring*, when she's staring at that dark corner of the room. She's freaking out that something is there. Her sister was insisting, 'No one is there.' Joey was mesmerising, and she's done a great job on *Wish Upon*."

Leonetti previously directed *Annabelle*, the *Conjuring* spin-off featuring a demonic doll that tormented a family. *Wish Upon* centres around an ominous artefact. In both cases, inanimate objects scare the heebie-jeebies out of audiences, and for good reason.

"Because they don't really talk, it creates a world of mystery," Leonetti offers. "It's funny how a doll or a box can emit fright, if you will. Things that are cute and enticing can also be very creepy, such as a doll or a music box. The trick, though, is how do you make them frightening? That's the challenge. How do you pull an audience into that situation with those things, and then get under their skin?"

ABOVE

Having worked on *The Conjuring 2* and directed *Annabelle*, John R. Leonetti is back in familiar territory

BELOW

Claire (Joey King) is given a mysterious box. Anyone say 'Lament Configuration'?



Leonetti served as cinematographer on *Child's Play 3*, *Dead Silence*, *Insidious* and *The Conjuring* before helming *Annabelle*. Those experiences provided him with a unique perspective on how to build relentless tension and then successfully pay it off.

"*Wish Upon* is different than *Annabelle*, although there is a supernatural force behind the box," Leonetti says. "There is that similarity. We are actually going to put more of that in the movie before we release it. In a way, this is more like *Final Destination* because it's not a contrived mousetrap, but it has inevitable consequences. People watching the movie know crap is going to happen, but they don't necessarily know to who or how it's going to happen."

DEATH BECOMES HER

"There's a scene in the movie that I set

up with a garbage disposal," he continues. "The first time you meet Clare's neighbour is early in the movie. Later on, she's chopping away, and the box opens up and starts playing. Then she has her hand in the garbage disposal. Immediately, everyone knows, 'Oh shit. Something is going to happen with that.' It's how you play on that, divert from that, and take the time to let the audience squirm long enough that they can't take it anymore, before you throw them a curveball and then slap them on the backside of the head. Every single death in this movie is different. I always say, 'You have to be patient in suspense.' You need to take time and let things breathe. 'Less is more, until more is just enough' is another saying I have. To many people, foreplay is the best part of sex, and so is suspense at arriving at terror or messing with people."

"Furthermore, I learned demon force is international in terms of mystique and interest, especially because people are religious," Leonetti adds. "*Wish Upon* is not what you would call a 'jump-scare movie', so it's different than *Annabelle* in that respect, even though there are some jumps in the film. That's what people expect in a horror movie, but again, it's not just a horror movie. It's really a thriller. I would take my tool box from *Annabelle* for creating suspense and apply it to this."

Audiences expect inventive casualties – it's part and parcel for this genre of film. Nonetheless, Leonetti promises more shock than extreme gore. After all, this is a PG-13 movie, and not rated R.

"There are definitely graphic images," notes Leonetti. "We are trying





“Foreplay is the best part of sex, and so is suspense at arriving at terror or messing with people”

to push the envelope on that. The thing about this movie is it's a fantasy/teen thriller with horrific moments. It's a horror, it's a thriller, it's a fantasy and teen movie, all in one.”

Clare isn't totally innocent for the suffering unleashed on her friends. Even before the box corrupts her, she spitefully wishes that mean girl Darcie Chapman (Josephine Langford) “would just go rot.” That point invokes a major question: is Clare a victim of circumstance, or is she getting what she deserves?

“Clare is the protagonist, and the box is the antagonist, but people can't help root for her and get pissed at her at the same time,” Leonetti says. “If we accomplish both of those things, we've done our job. Clare makes wishes that are selfish, but they are kind of justified by the fact that she's sad. She loses her mother as a child. It's still taking a toll on her and her life. It's very evident at the opening of the movie that's what is going on. She's haunted by something. It's understandable, in general, the wishes that Clare makes. I do believe we want to root for her.”

“What we're trying to get across is she's drugged,” he continues. “She's a

‘aholic’ of some sort. That hopefully allows the audience to sympathise with Clare a bit. Jonathan is telling her to give the box up, and she's not ready. It's got her.”

Whether Clare manages to put a stop to the cursed box's vicious cycle remains to be seen. However, movie studios dream of launching

ABOVE

Also in over their heads are Alice Lee and Ki Hong Lee

new franchises. Regardless, if Clare breaks the box's hold over her, it could ultimately land in someone else's lap.

“Over the years, the box has been found by different people,” adds Leonetti. “You can't beat the box. Eventually, one way or another, it's discarded or left somewhere. Someone else randomly finds it and figures out you can make wishes with it.”

“There's no question that at the end of this movie, there definitely could be another *Wish Upon*,” Leonetti concludes. “It's very logical that there will be one. It's very evident.”

BELOW

The phrase ‘be careful what you wish for’ proves to be chillingly apt



IT COMES AT NIGHT

Attaining the feat of becoming one of the year's most anticipated horror flicks, despite keeping its secrets close, Bryan Cairns attempts to decipher 2017's most mysterious movie...

It Comes At Night finds the world under siege by an unnatural threat, and one man, Paul (Joel Edgerton) – along with his wife Sarah (Carmen Ejogo) and son Travis (Kelvin Harrison Jr) – are put through emotional and psychological hell when a desperate family seeking a safe haven disrupts their household. This exercise in would-be, nail-biting suspense will open 9 June in the US, and is written and directed by Trey Edwards Shults.

The movie follows two families struggling to survive an unknown danger outside as they begin to crack under the pressure inside. Harrison, a young actor best known for the TV Series *StartUp*, portrays teenager Travis, one of the individuals holed up in their home.

“Being the only child, Travis is really dependent on everything his parents say and do for him,” Harrison says. “Processing all the stuff going on, it’s like, ‘Okay, I’m going to trust my parents and the decisions that they make. They understand what’s going on and how to handle this.’ There’s a fear about everything happening outside this house and everything happening within this house. He’s ultimately relying on this trust and the people who raised him.”

It Comes At Night has a cloak of secrecy over it. What the ‘It’ represents remains one of the story’s biggest mysteries. The film’s trailer doesn’t shed much light on the subject, either. However, here’s what

I T

C O M E S

A T

N I G H T



we know. People are sick. A guy wears a gas mask. Could those signs mean a deadly outbreak? That dangling question offers the perfect catalyst for tightly wound characters intent on surviving – no matter the cost – to become unhinged.

“It’s interesting, because this other family had a completely different experience than us,” explains Harrison. “My family has almost had an ideal situation. We have to make this decision to allow this presence inside. It becomes a matter of, ‘Okay, do we trust them? Do we know who they are or why they are here? What happens now? Do we come together and fight against whatever is happening?’ It becomes a big issue of values and loyalty, and ultimately, ‘What do I do to protect my family?’”

It’s clear the cramped and confined quarters begin to take a toll on the two families. In one sequence, the camera creeps down a long hallway towards an ominous door that should be locked... but isn’t. As paranoia builds and boils over, things spiral out of control.

“It becomes this notion of, ‘Are you crazy?’” Harrison reports. “Everyone is clawing at each other. Tensions get high because you’re in the same house with the same people for so long. You start to get to know these people, but it’s like, ‘Should I trust them?’ Then it’s, ‘Is the threat here, or outside? What’s behind the door?’ There are so many questions. And because we’re sick, we start to get immersed in the psychology of what is happening within



“Trey was so young when we made the movie, so he felt like my older brother,” says Harrison. “We all stayed in the same hotel. It didn’t necessarily feel so crazy. And the way he shot things... Trey has a very specific filmmaking style. It wasn’t like we overdid anything. Most of the time, it was a couple of takes and we were done.

takes and snap out of it. Joel is actually hilarious, so the set was light.”

At the time of this interview, Harrison had already seen a cut of *It Comes At Night*. The rising star praised the thriller as “amazing and fast-paced.” In his opinion, the intensity, jolts and personal stakes will appeal to a broader audience than some of the creepy competition.

“I’m more into the psychological aspect of horror,” says Harrison. “It feels more real than blood and guts. I’m from New Orleans. I lived through Katrina. We had to be in the same house for a really long time with the people we love. The stuff that went down, and the way personalities shifted and people changed, everyone becomes different after a while. It becomes tense. You start to question your own sanity. I feel it’s much more personal. I have to put myself in their shoes. The blood and guts can be scary, but we can also disassociate and go, ‘That’s not real.’”

“This movie is a personal story for Trey, as well as a horror film,” Harrison concludes. “It’s hard to say more without spoilers, but it’s more than just a horror story. It’s a family story, so you will connect to the material on a deeper level and walk away with a great thrill.”

“I have to put myself in their shoes. The blood and guts can be scary, but we can also disassociate and go, ‘That’s not real’”

that one house, with all these human beings that we follow. That’s what keeps you on edge. You don’t know what to expect.”

Creaking noises, a dark setting and a strong sense of dread all contribute to the claustrophobic environment, and further fuel the families’ panic. Harrison notes that as an actor, remaining in a heightened state of terror and being confined to one space for an entire shoot can both elevate a performance and potentially present a challenge.

“Trey doesn’t do a lot of coverage,” Harrison continues. “It wasn’t a lot of repeating. You did it, you were done, and then we moved on. The movie doesn’t stay at this heightened reality the entire film, at least from my character’s perspective. He’s a teenager. There’s comfort and then discomfort. Most of the scary stuff we tackled towards the end. It was a week of screaming, being scared and crying. It’s tiring, but it doesn’t completely drain you with the right people. You make jokes in between

LEFT

Aside from a sinister teaser poster, very little about this has been revealed

ABOVE

It Comes At Night takes place in a world under threat, with one family about to see their peace shattered

DETAILS

UK RELEASE
TBC

RATING
TBC

DIRECTOR
Trey Edward Shults

STARRING
Joel Edgerton, Riley Keough, Christopher Abbott, Kelvin Harrison Jr, Carmen Ejogo



ABOVE

Welcome to this year's weirdest movie. And that's going some...

BELOW

Adult babies are an actual thing, but judging by the prosthetics, this could go in an even stranger direction

ADULT BABIES

Stealing secrets is far from child's play in *Adult Babies*, as Will Salmon finds out...

Everyone has a kink; something they're into that's just that bit unusual, whether they admit to it in public or not. Nylon, spanking, tickling... for some people it's something a little more elaborate. Take paraphilic infantilism – often known as 'adult baby' syndrome – a very specific form of role play where grown men and

women pretend to be infants, mewling, crying and being nursed by willing partners. Yes, it's a real thing, and it provides the backdrop for the third horror feature from the team of director Dominic Brunt and producer/actress Joanne Mitchell, who previously created hit Brit horrors *Before Dawn* and *Bait*.

DETAILS

UK RELEASE
Late 2017 TBC

DIRECTOR
Dominic Brunt

STARRING
Andrew Dunn
Kate Coogan
Sally Dexter

and when they're there they regress and become adult babies. But there are three intruders who enter the house trying to find a secret document..."

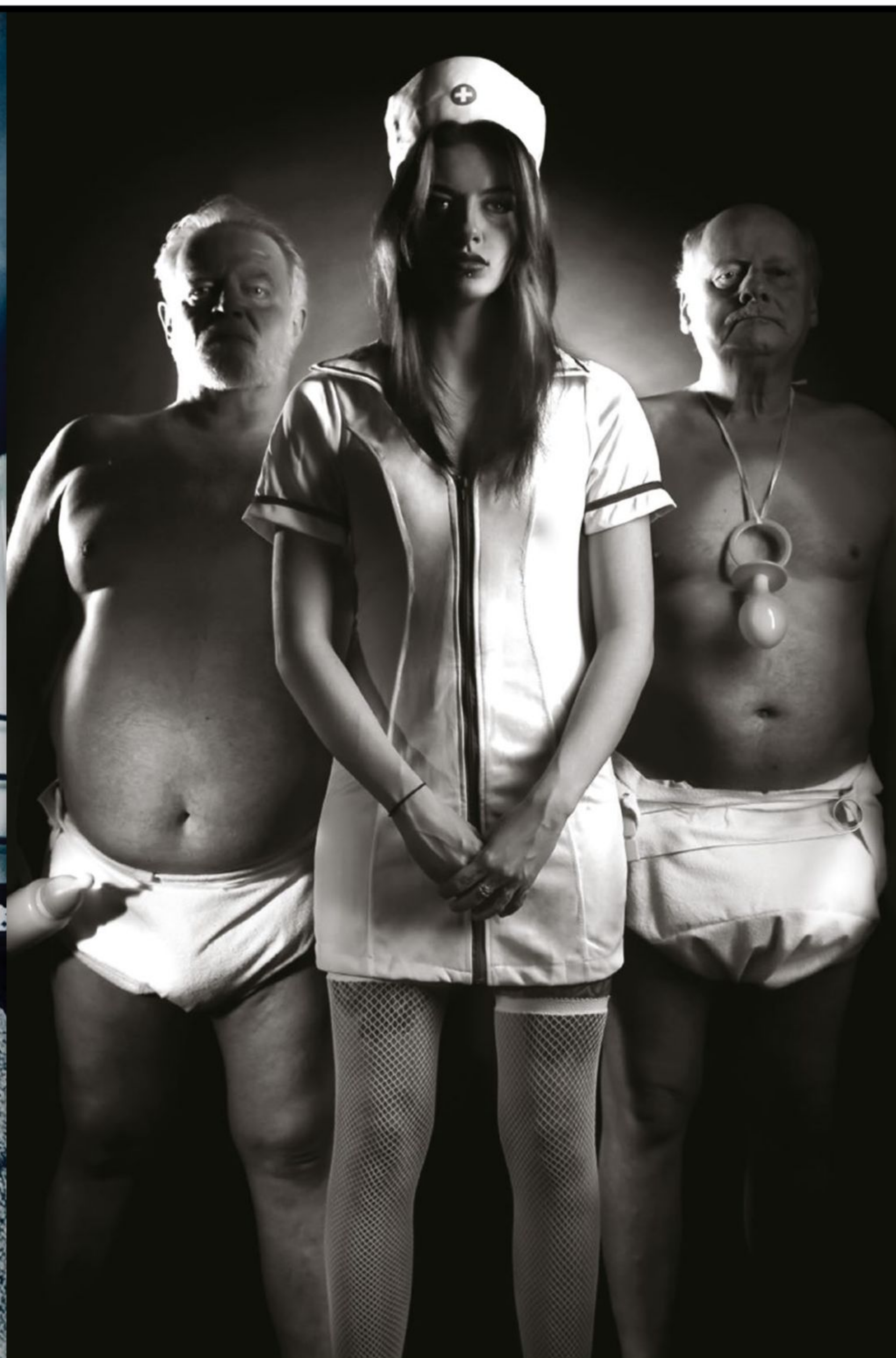
The film is not, Mitchell is keen to stress, a comment or judgement on real adult

babies. Instead, it's a genre-bending horror film that mixes satire and scares with live action, animation and claymation (courtesy of animator Lee Hardcastle). 'Bold' doesn't begin to cover it. "There's definitely satire there, yes," says Mitchell. "With satire you're making a comment on a political level, I suppose, and we do poke a few fingers..."

The film was shot over four weeks in 2016 in a country house in North Yorkshire, though Mitchell is keen to keep the actual location anonymous for now. "It's a secret location in the film, so it'd be quite nice to keep an air of

"We don't want to give too much away," says Mitchell when we ask about the plot of the recently completed picture, which is pegged for a late 2017 release. "We want to let the film speak for itself when it comes out. But basically, it's about a group of high-powered men – businessmen, whatever – who take refuge from the pressures and the strains of their busy, stressful lives by going to a retreat in this beautiful house in the middle of nowhere, which only they know about,





mystery around it! It was brilliant, and it happened really quickly. We had a fantastic crew and cast, and it went very, very smoothly.”

That ease of production was a direct contrast to the duo’s last film, 2014’s revenge thriller, *Bait*. “That was brilliant to work on as well, but it was really hard work. There were so many different locations in *Bait*, whereas here we were mainly in one location, which made it so much more easy and less stressful.”

BABY’S GOT A TEMPER

Mitchell storylined *Adult Babies* with Brunt (who is her husband, and co-founder of Mitchell-Brunt Films), and also appears on screen as Clinton, a minor character who Mitchell describes as, “An institutionalised monster – a complete psycho. With all characters you’ve got to try and root them in some sort of reality. These women have worked in this institution for a long time, so they don’t quite understand how the world is working outside.”

The cast features a who’s who of recognisable faces from British TV, including Andrew Dunn and Kate Coogan as a husband and wife, while Mica Proctor and Curtis Lowe play the couple’s children from previous relationships. Sally Dexter plays Margaret, who Mitchell describes as “kind of a matron, and I’m her sidekick and second-in-command”, while Laurence J Harvey, Seamus O’Neill and Nicky Evans fill out the cast of periphery characters. “It was the biggest cast we’ve ever worked with,” says Mitchell. “We had a lot of nurses there as well, and a lot of men playing adult babies.”

While Mitchell is keen to avoid comparisons with other films, she’s quick to praise the work of several other filmmakers. “I saw *Prevenge* recently, which I really enjoyed. I was really looking forward to seeing that, because obviously it’s a female filmmaker, and she was seven months pregnant. I’m totally in awe of her [*Prevenge* director and star Alice Lowe]

for doing that. So I really, really enjoyed that. I loved *The Autopsy Of Jane Doe* and Anna Biller’s *The Love Witch*. And I can’t wait to see *Get Out*.” She’s also thrilled with the way horror movies are being increasingly embraced by the mainstream “It’s becoming much more popular now, isn’t it, horror? People are becoming a little bit more open-minded about it now, I think. That’s what the genre needs to do. And it’s great that women are becoming a little bit more apparent in it as well.

“I think what we really want – and I think what is really important with the film – is that the audience make their own minds about it,” Mitchell continues. “I think it’s quite apparent that we don’t want to lay everything out on a plate for the audience to see. I think the audience will make it of it what they want to, and see what they want to within the film. It’s very, very different from *Before Dawn*, which was very different from *Bait*. It’s been quite a challenge to do, but it’s been huge amounts of fun.”

ABOVE

It has the biggest cast actress/co-producer Joanne Mitchell has worked with



UPSIDE —DOWN— REVISITED

With *Stranger Things* back at Halloween for a second season, Martyn Conterio talks us through the 11 (see what we did?) things we want to see in Netflix's returning breakout hit...

Stranger Things appeared as if out of nowhere in the summer of 2016, and earned a legion of die-hard fans almost overnight. Like the fearsome Demogorgon punching a gnarled fist through Joyce Byers' wall and running amok in Hawkins, Indiana, creators the Duffer brothers (Matt and Ross) found themselves not just with a certified smash hit on their hands; *Stranger Things* broke into the zeitgeist of pop culture, and made an instant icon of Millie Bobby Brown's telekinetic moppet, Eleven.

Stranger Things is presented as the greatest adaptation of the greatest Stephen King novel he never wrote. Indebted to the horror maestro's nightmare writings, other chief



inspirations include Amblin-era Steven Spielberg, and Tobe Hooper's suburban shockfest, *Poltergeist*.

A cornucopia of all things 1980s, *Stranger Things* isn't really a television or web series. It's

closer in look, tone and vision to a movie told in chapters. Note, for example, the added digital grain and dust specks on the opening titles, as if we're watching a film running through a projector. Nothing about *Stranger Things* is exactly original, but thanks to a compelling story, great characters, perfect cast and calculated use of nostalgia, it left an immediate impression. Curiously, the one element it lacks is memorable dialogue. Maybe they'll work on that in Season Two?

Set to return this Halloween, expectation, hype and fan theories will grow more and more feverish as the premiere date draws closer. Here are the pressing questions we want answered...

1. What happened to Eleven?

In the Season One finale, as shadowy government goons led by Dr Martin Brenner (Matthew Modine) rocked up to Hawkins High School and attempted to kidnap Eleven, the Demogorgon appeared and proceeded to cause

“Stranger Things is presented as the greatest adaptation of the greatest Stephen King novel he never wrote”



ABOVE
Season Two moves into 1984, as evidenced by the Ghostbusters garb

» merry havoc and feast on said shadowy government goons. Lucas Sinclair (Caleb McLaughlin) attempted to kill the monster with his slingshot and a few rocks (bless him), then a severely weakened Eleven rallied and destroyed the cabbage-headed freakazoid. But she also apparently sacrificed herself in the cause, performing a vanishing act as the Demogorgon flaked away into the nothingness.

Mike Wheeler (Finn Wolfhard) was starting to get the feels for El (as he calls her), in what are classic ‘first love’ pangs, that point in life when some lads declare to pals that girls are full of cooties and gross, but secretly pine for them from afar and struggle with their emotions.



It has been confirmed that El is coming back in Season Two, but the Duffer brothers are possibly going to hold off her reappearance

“Will’s been in the Upside Down for an entire week, and it’s had some kind of an effect on him”

until a pivotal point in the unfolding drama. Hopefully, the crewcut-headed heroine’s return won’t be as belated as Luke’s in *The Force Awakens*. That would be supremely annoying.

Where is she? Has she been banished to the Upside Down? Is all this telekinesis turning her brain to mush and slowly killing the poor girl? There are hints throughout Season One that Eleven’s narrative trajectory might be a very tragic one. We hope we’re wrong though.

2. What’s going on with Will?

One week in the Upside Down is some serious hardcore survival (Bear Grylls couldn’t hack it). Will Byers (Noah Schnapp) spent most of Season One curled up shivering in the alternate dimension version of Castle Byers (his secret den in the woods), trying not to be eaten by the ever-lurking Demogorgon.

In Season One’s closing scene, ostensibly a joyful Christmas dinner at the quickly – perhaps

ABOVE
After being missing from Season One, Will rejoins the gang

too quickly – redecorated and rebuilt Byers home, young Will excused himself from dining on his mum’s sloppy mash potatoes, went to the bathroom and threw up a parasitic-like creature – a moment that referenced David Cronenberg’s 1975 body-horror classic, *Shivers*.

Will is suffering from post-traumatic stress and feeling out of sorts, the Duffers have explained. Schnapp has also been bumped up to the main cast. The pair explained Will’s emotional state to *Variety*: “Will’s been there for

an entire week, and it’s had some kind of effect on him, both emotionally and perhaps physically. The idea is he’s escaped this nightmare place, but has he really?”

When Joyce (Winona Ryder) and Sheriff Hopper (David Harbour) rescued Will from the Upside Down, he was stuck to a wall, encased in hardened gloop – it was all very *Aliens*. A funnel made from bio-matter was attached his face (again, very *Aliens*), and viewers will have noted – for extra geek points – the decayed *Alien*-type

egg Hopper came across while walking through the darkened forest. What has Will been forced to ingest, and for what purpose?

The slug creature that he barfed up into the sink could easily grow and transform – like a xenomorph – and cause bloody murder in Hawkins, right? No doubt, the Season One cliffhanger will have major repercussions. You don’t just chuck up an inter-dimensional slug and expect the matter to rest. This is no goldfish flushed down the toilet we’re talking about, here.

3. Who are the new cast?

Season Two is set in 1984, roughly a year on from Season One, which explains the lads wearing *Ghostbusters* costumes in the teaser trailer. Now, given the fact that the show is one big nostalgic homage to the era’s Hollywood movies, Stephen King novels, board game obsessions and food (hello, Eggo waffles), there would always be a temptation to cast old faces in new roles. While Ryder and Modine rose to



Back to the 80s

How *Stranger Things* showed its love for the decade of Spielberg and King

The amount of references to popular movies contained in *Stranger Things* is positively dizzying. There could be a pub quiz dedicated solely to allusions, riffs and direct quotations, not to mention the fun viewers have spotting film posters in Jonathan's bedroom or the Wheelers' basement.

In one comic scene, Lonnie tells Jonathan to remove his *Evil Dead* poster from the wall because it's "not appropriate." A *Jaws* one-sheet pops up elsewhere, along with *The Thing*. Fans can expect this tradition, as well as the use of yesteryear pop tunes over the end credits, to continue in Season Two. A *Nightmare On Elm Street* was released in 1984, so that's one poster we can surely expect.

But the biggest influence – arguably its number one inspiration – isn't a film; it's a novel. Stephen King's *It* featured a group of kids fighting off a demonic monster disguised as a clown. The book was adapted for a television miniseries in 1990, with a memorable performance from Tim Curry as Pennywise. The novel – and film – *Firestarter* (another work by King) served as chief inspiration for Eleven. The Duffer brothers have also mentioned *Alien*, Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist* and Spielberg's *ET*, which is directly referenced in the scene when Mike, Lucas and Dustin disguise Eleven by putting her a blonde wig and one of Nancy's old dresses.

The Demogorgon's woodland jaunts recall *Predator*, too. Nancy's investigation into the woods behind Steve house leads her into a close encounter of the very scary kind, and Jonathan the perv's camera captures the blurred outline of the beast looming over poor Barb in the moments leading up to her demise.

One Eighties sci-fi horror that surely must have come into discussion is another Tobe Hooper film – *Invaders From Mars*, a remake of the Fifties B-picture by William Cameron Menzies. Not as well-known as *Poltergeist*, the film tells the story of a little boy who believes his hometown is being taken over by martians.

Hooper's remake shares much with *Stranger Things*, such as the Cold War setting and being told from a child's view of a world, which suddenly goes from banal to super weird. Season Two's finale is provisionally titled 'The Brain', which could well have been inspired by the brainiac martian – it literally looks like a talking brain – from Hooper's film.



ABOVE

It looks like the Nancy/Jonathan/Steve love triangle will continue

» prominence in the penultimate decade of the 20th century – Ryder in such films as *Beetlejuice* and *Heathers*, and Modine in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* – they're not the only famous Eighties faces we'll be seeing in the near future.

Sean Astin (Mikey from *The Goonies*) and Paul Reiser (corporate sneak Carter Burke in James Cameron's *Aliens*) are set to appear as a love interest for Joyce and a government PR lackey sent to Hawkins to hush things up. Reiser's role (Dr Owens) draws directly upon Burke, though how closely remains to be seen.



Two more additions to the cast come in the form of Linnea Berthelsen as Roman, a lady with a tearjerker past, and Brett Gelman as Murray Bauman, a conspiracy theorist and journalist. Bob sounds the least interesting, but surely the Duffers have got bigger plans for Astin than 'Joyce's new boyfriend'?

Last year, the first teaser trailer for Season Two aired. It showed zero in the way of footage, instead rattling off nine chapter titles. Since then, the Duffers have urged caution. These titles might well change. But it got tongues wagging, and fan theories on Reddit went into maximum overdrive. One of the coolest titles – and another direct movie reference – was 'Chapter One: Madmax'. *American Odyssey*'s Sadie Sink (pictured on the previous page) will play Max, described as a new friend in the mix, and her brother Billy (Dacre Montgomery) is making his debut. Billy was inspired, like so much of the show, by Stephen King books. Matt Duffer has been tight-lipped about Billy's part, but commented: "Stephen King always has really great human villains."



BELOW

At the end of the Season, the demogorgon was killed by Eleven



4. What are the monsters?

What's that coming over the hill, is it a monster? The spider-like colossus is tantalisingly spied in the second teaser trailer; first as a drawing (presumably Will's) and in a scene which directly references little Barry's abduction in *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* (1977). Is the monster glimpsed under a burning red sky, looming on the horizon, about to go all King Kong on small-town Hawkins? Is it a dream? A prophecy of things to come? Or is Hawkins about to be invaded by Lovecraftian beings from another realm? Given Will is traumatised from his week-long sojourn in Upsidedownland, could he be manifesting –



through his imagination – these diabolical hellions? Or is the portal getting bigger and bigger, and attracting the attention of Upside Down denizens of the dark?

“Is Hawkins about to be invaded by Lovecraftian beings from another realm?”

Not to get all Randy from the *Scream* series, but there are dictats and rules sequels must follow in order to sate viewer appetite. Sequels always go bigger! Chapter 14 of Season Two is titled 'The Pollywog', referring to a tadpole or amphibian. The Duffers have said Dustin will be paired with a pet – one not of this world – and it could well be this 'pollywog' that the chapter title references.

5. Is Dr Brenner alive?

With his shock of white hair and ice-cold demeanour, Matthew Modine's Season One Big Bad, Dr Martin Brenner, was attacked by the Demogorgon in the last episode, but we didn't actually see him killed. His death – if that's what we can call it – occurred off-screen. This gave the Duffers some wiggle room when deciding whether to continue Brenner's story.

Will Modine return as Eleven's 'Papa'? While he isn't listed in the cast roster, Modine has teased Brenner's return on Instagram, cryptically writing, "More to be revealed, uncovered." If the wicked doc survived the

BELOW

Lucas and Dustin more than proved their mettle in Season One



“What if there are multiple Upside Downs?”



Demogorgon, he might well be all scarred up and wheelchair bound – like a cross between Dr Strangelove and *Hannibal*’s Mason Verger.

Brenner’s back story is fascinating. If you go back to ‘Chapter Three’ and the scene where Hopper goes through the microfiches, looking at old news stories about the CIA MKUltra programme, Brenner’s controversial career is partially revealed. That name, too, brings to mind Nazi scientists taken over to the US after the fall of the Third Reich. Brenner means ‘Burner’ in German, FYI. Anyway, if you



pause the screen and read those reports – they add context and mystery to the character’s shady past. The guy is essentially the classic mad scientist.

6. Will Eleven be reunited with her mother and Aunt Becky?

Eleven’s real name is Jane Ives, and she was stolen from her mother, who mostly sits in a rocking chair zonked out of her gourd, thanks to years of exposure to Brenner’s experiments. It’s left to Aunt Becky (Amy Seimetz) to deliver exposition to Hopper and Joyce.

Terry gave birth to her daughter, but was told she miscarried in the third trimester. Miss Ives caused a stink in the press, attempted to sue Dr Brenner and the Hawkins lab, but no dice. While Terry looks more than a bit frazzled, she’s correct about Brenner stealing her baby. Will mother and daughter (and auntie) be reunited? The Duffer brothers could possibly hold off this reunion for several series.

7. What does Hopper know about Eleven?

David Harbour’s performance as Sheriff Jim Hopper is a Season One highlight. A former city cop exiled to his hometown, tortured by the death of his daughter from cancer, there’s dramatic irony in the fact that he’s forced back into caring about people and taking part in saving a group of kids in a world of trouble, when he couldn’t save his Sarah.

One of the key themes of *Stranger Things* is crap fathers. It’s very Spielbergian in that regard, and proffers what amounts to the good-but-kind-of-antiheroic dad (Hopper), the totally bad dad (Dr Brenner) and the ugly, conniving dad (Lonnie Byers). While he shined through in the end, Hopper, to put it bluntly, sold Eleven out to the Man (well, Dr Brenner), in a bid to bring back Will and a sense of normality to a town previously boring as hell, and that’s just the way Hopper liked it.

At the end of ‘Chapter Eight: The Upside Down’, Hopper is seen driving off with



ABOVE
Will spent most of Season One in the Upside Down



BELOW
Hooper proved a highlight of the first outing

government agents. Where have they taken him? His peace deal with the government – possibly rogue elements of the administration – could mean the sheriff might be clued in on El’s disappearance and whereabouts. Taking finger food from the office Christmas party into the woods and placing it in a wooden box – along with El’s beloved Eggo waffles – means two things: Hopper is feeling guilty about selling out a little girl who needed his help, and he knows she’s alive, but must keep it a secret.



8. Is there more than one Upside Down?

The kids comprehend their quest to find Will Byers as if it’s a game, with rules they can follow for rough guidance. ‘The Vale of Shadows’ is a *Dungeons & Dragons* dimension that is “a dark reflection, or echo, of our world,” as Dustin puts it. At this point, the trio have developed their theory that their homeslice, Will, is trapped in another realm. The Vale of Shadows – nerd alert – isn’t actually *D&D* canon, but a reworked bit of lore and a play on such places as the Plane of Shadows.

But what’s perhaps most intriguing in ‘Chapter Five: The Flea And The Acrobat’ is when schoolteacher Mr Clarke explains to his students about high energy fields creating a portal from one place to another. But what if there are multiple Upside Downs? Using Carl Sagan’s multiple dimensions theory, Mr Clarke also talks in the plural.

The Upside Down looks like a sparse environment, and appeared magically in the

Missing presumed...?

Is there more to the Hawkins National Laboratory than you think?

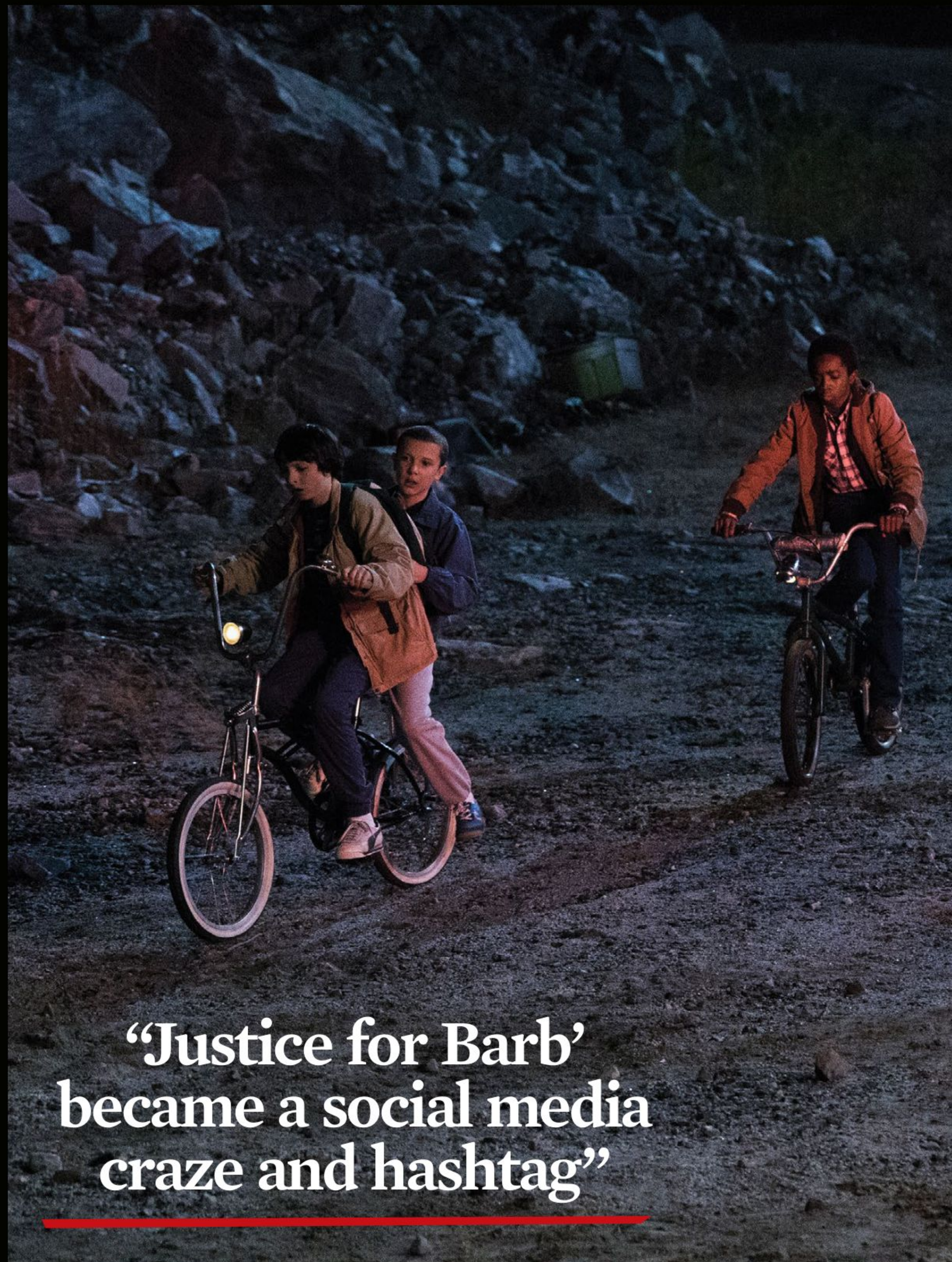
A chief joy of watching Season One is the amount of tantalising questions left unanswered, subject to further investigation. Most of these centre on the Hawkins National Laboratory – which is connected to the Department of Energy – and whether Dr Brenner is conducting tests so secret not even the government knows about them. Also, what is it that he wants from the Upside Down? Is it to build a race of super soldiers or bio-weapons, or something even more maniacal and self-centred?

The background to the laboratory and Brenner’s experiments actually comes from real-life. From the Fifties to Seventies, the US government was pumping funding into ludicrous programmes codenamed MKUltra, as a response to Soviet espionage and a belief boffins would discover the secrets of mind control. If Eleven has proven the best performing guinea pig, it begs the question: do the Russians know anything about the Upside Down? Don’t forget, *Stranger Things* takes place during the latter days of the Cold War. Have the commies also accessed the dimension or found it by accident? Is this a purely Stateside concern?

Another thing about Jane Ives – why is she called Eleven? Well, that’s the number printed on her arm. Where are the other ten ‘specimens’? Have they been disregarded or killed by Dr Brenner because they didn’t produce the telekinetic goods?

The HNL is bound to play a prominent role in Season Two. Once the Pandora’s Box that is the Upside Down was opened, the scientists might well be scrambling to find a way to shut the door permanently. Brenner’s forays into another dimension all ended in failure, and he let Joyce and Hopper suit up to retrieve Will because he thought they’d be gobbled up by a creature. So the potential of harnessing whatever is in that world is arguably the biggest mystery for Season Two to explore.





**“Justice for Barb”
became a social media
craze and hashtag”**

» lab basement when Eleven connected psychically to one of the monsters during one of her mind jaunts to spy on the commies. Mr Clarke’s explanation, too, recalls the cosmic horror writings of HP Lovecraft, specifically his 1936 short story, *The Haunter Of The Dark*, where fantastical, eldritch ‘things’ exist all around us, but we fail to perceive them. The Upside Down could well be a multiverse.



9. What about the Nancy, Steve/Jonathan situation?

Steve Harrington (Joe Keery) starts out as a typical jock doucher, but ends up acting heroic – if a little freaked out that his sense of reality has changed dramatically – when he fends off a Demogorgon attack at the Byers’ house. The tension between Steve and poor boy Jonathan (there’s a whiff of class conflict between their rivalry) leads to a brutal fight (Steve comes off worse) and Nancy being treated like she’s a prize to be won. Steve is rightfully wary of Jonathan, who took peeping tom photos of Nancy and in general is a bit of a sulky puss.

What’s interesting about the Season One coda, where normality as returned to Hawkins (for the time being), is Steve and Nancy are back together (check out his dorky Christmas sweater), and he’s obviously bought a camera for Jonathan, to say sorry and no hard feelings

for smashing his prized possession in a fit of rage previously. There was definitely chemistry between Nancy and Jonathan, and they’d gone through a lot together, so will this teenage love triangle run on into Season Two? Chances are it will, with potential for plenty of comedy bickering and lingering tensions between Steve and Jonathan.

10. Justice for Barb?

Barbara Holland – known to pretty much everyone as Barb – was a minor character in the early episodes. Her tragic fate as food for the Demogorgon resulted in Barb becoming the show’s second most iconic figure. The reaction to ‘poor Barb’ – and the peculiar fact nobody but high school BFF Nancy Wheeler gave a crap about her – took the Duffers by surprise. She was meant as nothing more than a snack for the monster, a narrative entry point into the larger plot for Nancy, and never intended as a fan fixation.




BELOW
The kids have been
the breakout stars
of the show

'Justice for Barb' became a social media craze and hashtag. The fans demanded there be some form of tribute in Season Two, and the creators acquiesced. What form this will take is as yet unknown. Maybe Nancy will have a photo in a frame by her bedside? One thing's for sure: we'll never forget Barb.

11. Who is the Lost Brother?

Most of the aforementioned episode titles are fairly obvious 1980s B-movie fascimiles ('The Pollywog', 'The Secret Cabin'), but one has caught our eye: finale 'The Lost Brother'.

In three words, the Duffers have managed to encourage even more frenzied speculation, as if that was somehow possible. It's just one of many revelations that await us as we return to the Upside Down... 

Stranger Things: Season Two will return to Netflix at Halloween.



Pop Culture Shock

How it slipped its tendrils into the real world

Pop! Funkos

Last summer, the world went nuts for all things *Stranger Things*, and has pretty much continued into 2017. You know you've made it into the big time, when the character you play in a net series becomes a Funko Pop figurine. Eleven, Barb, the Demogorgon, Joyce, Lucas, Will, Dustin and Mike – each has had the toy treatment. In Eleven's case, there are several versions: in her blonde wig, sporting the deprivation tank helmet or the shaved head. The latter comes with Eleven clutching a box of Eggo waffles.

Eggo Waffles

As with Twinkies in *Ghostbusters*, Eggo waffles have become the food stuff obsession for fans, who have probably never heard of the Kellogg's brand before. The teaser trailer released earlier this year began with a mock commercial of two children arguing over Eggos. Rumour has it Kellogg's executives are in talks with the Duffers and Netflix to create a promo tie-in. If Eggo waffles are good enough for Eleven, they're good enough for ravenous pop junkie fans.

Emmys

Thrust into the limelight, the kids of *Stranger Things* began to make appearances at awards shows. In September 2016, they performed at the Emmys, singing 'Uptown Funk' live. The kids were on a surer footing when included in Jimmy Fallon's 74th Golden Globes cold opener.

A brilliantly devised six-minute spoof of *La La Land* (2016) featuring a starry

ensemble were included for their own special segment, in which Millie Bobby Brown rapped in the back of a van – "My name is Eleven and I'm 24/7, I eat Eggo waffles by the pound" – before letting us all in on a big secret: "Barb is really alive!" Cut to: the gloriously berserk sight of Shannon Purser rising out of a swimming pool for a Busby Berkeley style sequence involving synchronised swimmers all dressed like Barb.

Winona's Face

Stranger Things mania didn't end there, however. Winona Ryder caused a social media storm of good feelings, with her range of funny facial expressions during an awards acceptance speech – which was typically actorly, impassioned and a bit much – by David Harbour. The show had just won a Screen Actors Guild award for Best Ensemble in a Drama.

Saturday Night Live

Saturday Night Live jumped on the bandwagon, with a skit involving Kate McKinnon as Eleven and an introduction by the Duffer brothers in which they cop to the fact Lucas's parents never appeared on screen, or were bothered about what their boy was up to.

Kenan Thompson and *Ghostbusters* star Leslie Jones appeared as Lucas's folks: "Lucas, I told you not to hang out with these little white kids," Jones says. When Lucas explains the concept of the Upside Down, Jones quips, "People like us already live in the Upside Down!"

HORROR GOES VIRAL

**STRANGER
THINGS HAS
GOT US
ASKING THE
QUESTION:**

WHERE'S BARB? BUT IT
WASN'T THE FIRST TO TAKE
ITS ADVERTISING
BEYOND TRADITIONAL
APPROACHES:
STEPHEN KELLY CHARTS
THE HISTORY OF VIRAL
MARKETING IN HORROR...

It's little surprise that viral marketing has its roots in horror. After all, it was created as a new way to promote film; one driven by people and word-of-mouth; by stories that may or may not be true. It's a similar idea to ghost stories, urban legends and campfire whispers; horror that people have been sharing among themselves for centuries. As such, viral marketing has thrived under horror; its history a triumph of creepy campaigns, shocking stunts and an ever-evolving Internet...



THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT (1999)

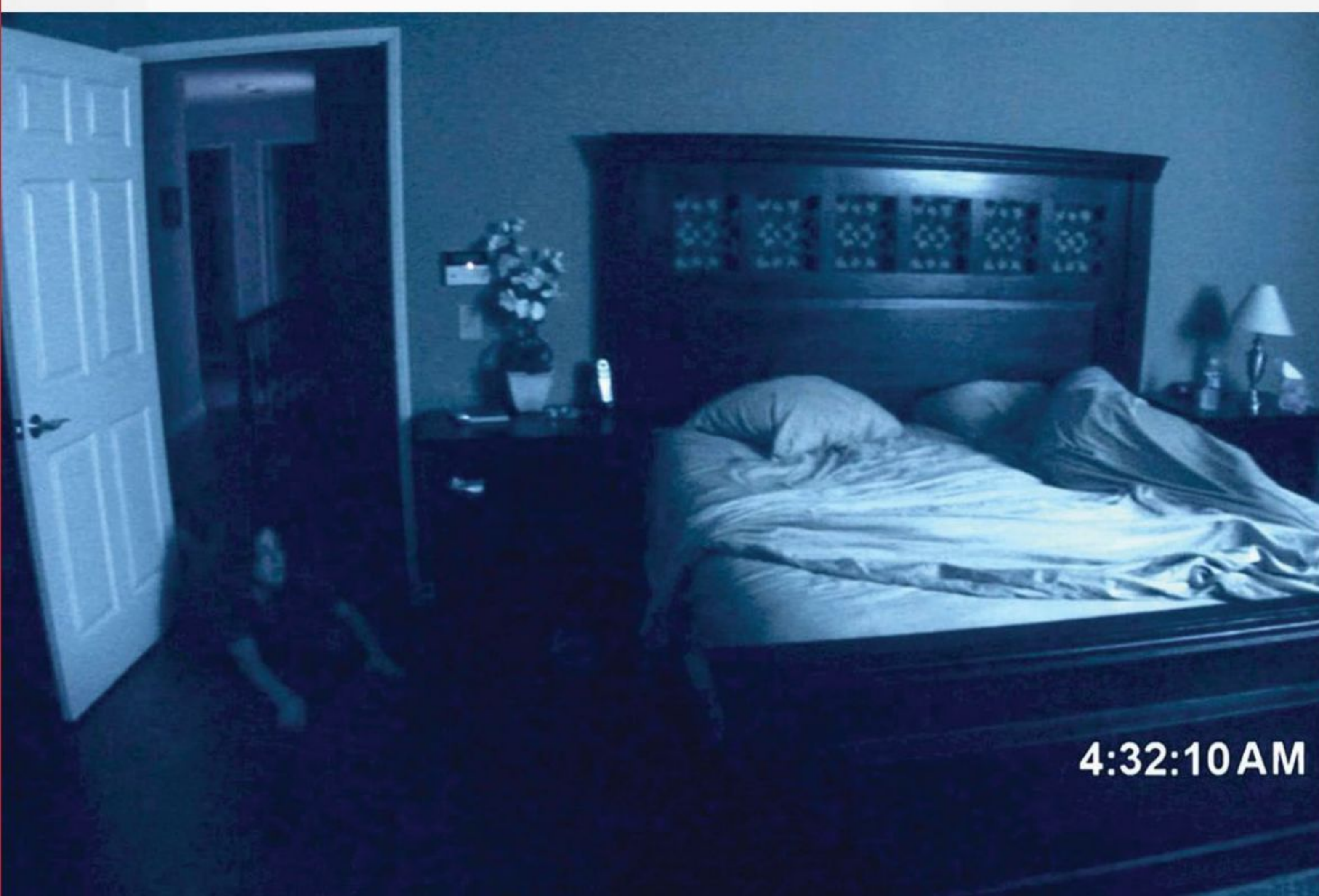
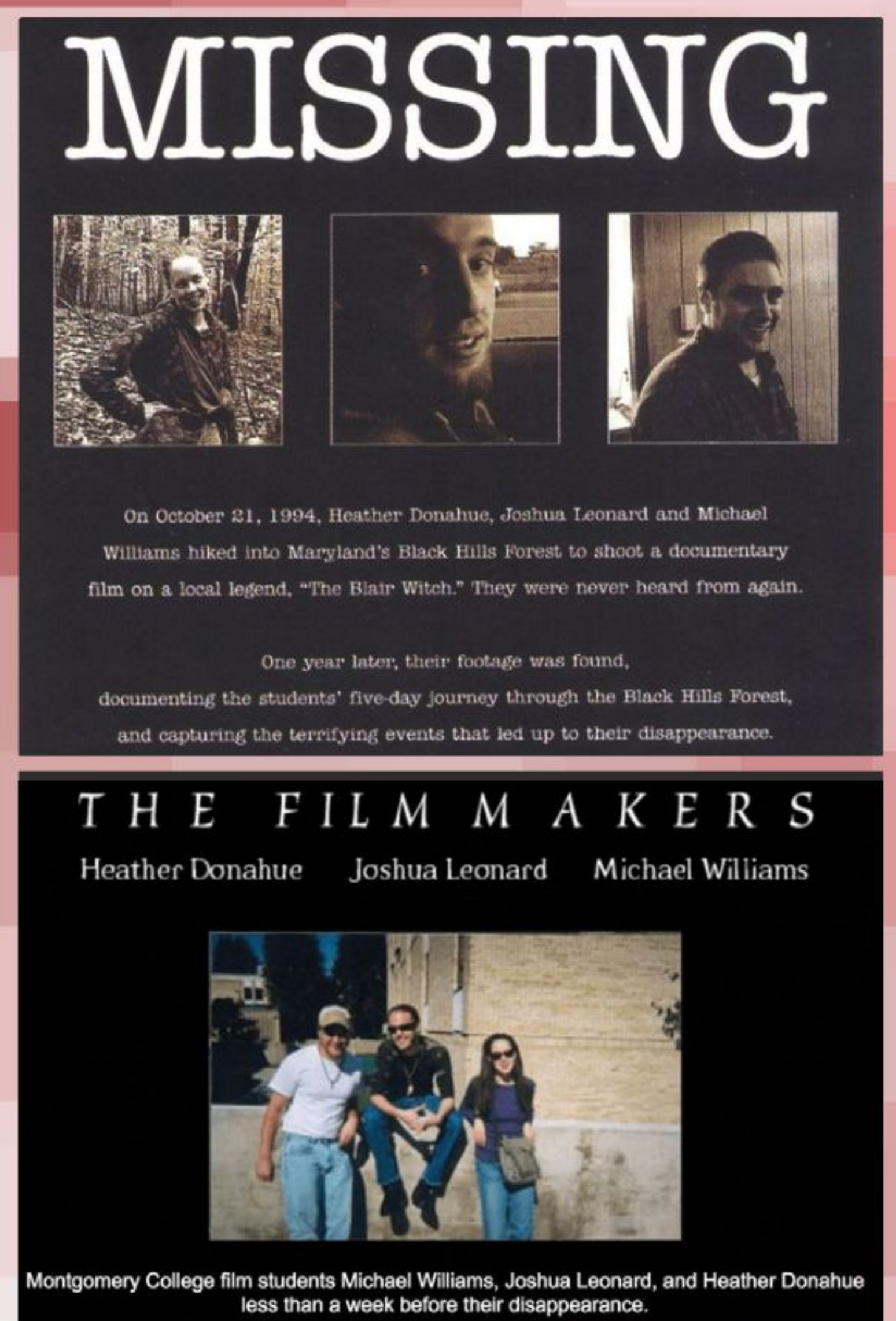
It's 1998, and there are stories on the Internet; stories of three film students who went off to make a documentary about a legend concerning witches and a child-snatching hermit, but never returned.

All that was left behind was a buried duffle bag containing audio tapes and videos. According to a website, someone cut the footage into a terrifying film. It's true; I read it on the Internet.

The Blair Witch Project was not the first found-footage film, nor was it the only horror to ever pass itself off as fact. But it was the first to truly take advantage of viral marketing. Six months before the film was screened at Sundance, directors Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick decided to launch a website to flesh out the film's background and myths; presenting

their story as some sort of urban legend, a truth you were never meant to discover. This was perpetuated further by interviews, bogus news stories and a faux-documentary on the Sci-Fi Channel. Without any form of conventional advertising, word of mouth began to spread. Made for \$22,000, *The Blair Witch Project* ended up making more than \$248 million at the box office.

The timing was perfect, you see. Pre-YouTube and social media, the Internet in the late Nineties was in its relative infancy; being a platform that allowed information to be shared, but whose high price and low speed made it niche. This meant that not only could stories not be fact-checked, but that one person with access could pass on the story to those who didn't, generating a buzz that was far cheaper than traditional forms of marketing, and way more effective. After all, who could resist finding out whether the stories were true?



PARANORMAL ACTIVITY (2007)

The Blair Witch Project laid the groundwork for viral marketing, but it would be nearly a decade before the concept became the norm; thanks, largely, to the growing sophistication of mid-Noughties Internet.

Perhaps the best example of this shift was *Paranormal Activity*. Regarded by many as the spiritual successor to *The Blair Witch Project*, it shared many of the same traits: found footage, cheap production and a viral marketing campaign that played upon notoriety. The difference, however, was social media, which allowed *Paranormal Activity* to interact with fans and build a community, stoking the fire of its word-of-mouth buzz with video reactions of its terrified audiences, and asking fans to 'demand' that the film was released in their home town by voting on a website. It was filmed on a home video camera for \$15,000; it made \$193.4 million.



CLOVERFIELD (2008)

Cloverfield's viral campaign was interesting for two reasons. Firstly, before anyone even knew what it was, it dropped a teaser trailer out of nowhere – one that revealed nothing but a teasing glimpse and a release date. Nature abhors a vacuum, and so do film fans, who went into overdrive with speculation. And secondly, building upon that mystery, the campaign then proceeded to build the film's back story online, dropping clues and riddles across fake websites. Among these were a fictional drink called Slusho!, and a drilling company called Tagruato – both of which, in their own ways, are responsible for the monster – and even bogus MySpace pages for the film's main characters. All the effort paid off, and *Cloverfield* raked in \$40 million in its opening weekend.



THE LAST EXORCISM (2010)

Viral marketing was not designed to be timeless. It relies on fads and trends, on what's popular at the time. Case in point: Remember Chatroulette? If not, it was the novelty chat website in which people would switch their webcams on, spin a wheel and be randomly assigned other users to speak to. Would it be your next best friend? Would it be a terrible penis? Or, thanks to the viral campaign of *The Last Exorcist*, would it be a young woman who suddenly turns into a monster? The video, showing the reactions of terrified users, has now been viewed over 9 million times.

PROMETHEUS (2012)

While *District 9* coined a clever style of film marketing by putting out a 'tone', Ridley Scott's sci-fi epic *Prometheus* took the idea to a more sophisticated level. This involved Fox putting out a number of videos to establish *Prometheus'* universe, most notably a fake TED conference set in the future, led by one of the film's characters: the billionaire entrepreneur Peter Weyland, played by Guy Pearce. An inevitable fake website was also created for 'Weyland Industries', giving context to the character's fictional business and its technological advancements that we would see come into effect in *Prometheus*. The campaign also produced a slick fake advertisement that introduces us to the film's breakout character, David, a highly classy android played by Michael Fassbender. Before all of this, *Prometheus'* most sellable factor was arguably its status as a prequel to horror-classic *Alien*, but this campaign was so memorable that it managed to give fans something else to talk about.





CARRIE (2013)

Thanks to the power of YouTube and the ability of social media to share its videos, stunts have come to play a larger part of viral market. Example: in promoting the remake of Seventies classic *Carrie*, its distributors struck viral gold with a hidden-camera experiment that garnered over 60 million views. The footage showed an upset, Carrie-esque teenager displaying supposed powers of telekinesis, just like in the film, which she uses to move furniture, throw someone against a wall and generally freak out her fellow customers for our amusement. Of course, the trick was created with a lot of pulley systems and stuntmen, but nothing sells an unnecessary remake like pranking Manhattan coffee drinkers.



DEVIL'S DUE (2014)

There was nothing too original about 2014's supernatural horror *Devil's Due*, which was filmed in a 'found-footage' style for seemingly no reason, and told the story of an expectant couple being followed by a Satanic cult, as if *Rosemary's Baby* never existed. The way the film was promoted, however, was a little more outside the box. In keeping with the spawn-of-Satan theme, an abandoned cot was set up on a busy street in New York, which popped up with an animatronic 'Devil baby' doll whenever people approached it. Of course, the reactions were filmed for a successful viral prank video to raise the film's awareness, racking up over 50 million views. If only that many people liked the actual film...

STRANGER THINGS (2016)

Thanks to social media, films and TV shows can react to fans fast, allowing them to take advantage of whatever happens to be popular about their particular story. For hit Netflix show *Stranger Things*, it was Barb, the underdog character who stole hearts with her oversized glasses and long-suffering life. When she was unceremoniously killed off three episodes in, her death caused an Internet phenomenon, with outraged memes, Reddit posts and think-pieces flaring up to defend the 'outcast' that so many viewers had related to. Netflix was quick to get wind of Barb's Internet popularity, and recently put out a faux newscast to honour her life, appease her fans, and probably remind people that Season Two was well on its way.



A CURE FOR WELLNESS (2017)

Viral marketing has changed a lot since *The Blair Witch Project* — but so has the Internet, and the world. Back in 1999, for instance, blurring the lines between truth and fiction felt strange and exciting, especially online, which was still relatively niche. But the Internet has grown from a specialist instrument to something used by everyone for everything — especially news, and by extension, truth.

This presents a problem for viral marketing, which is, in one way or another, dependent on subverting truth. Take *A Cure for Wellness*, the psychological horror directed Gore Verbinski. To promote the film, 20th Century Fox had the genius idea of setting up a series of 'fake news' websites, where stories such as 'Donald Trump secretly meeting with Vladimir Putin' and 'Trump banning vaccinations' were presented as true.

Embedded in the pieces were suggestions that readers protest against President Trump with the hashtag #ACureForWellness. The campaign didn't go down too well, and 20th Century Fox was forced into making an apology.



DICING WITH THE DEVIL

The kids in Stranger Things used their Dungeons & Dragons knowledge to save the day – but the tabletop board game wasn't always so fondly thought of. In this excerpt from his essay 'Dicing With The Devil: The Crusade Against Gaming', Gavin Baddeley explores the history and hardship of a pop-culture phenomenon...

“Like the sheep to which Scripture so often compares us, our freest play is within the fold. Outside, there is only the bondage of fear that allows for no real leisure”

—Peter Leithart and George Grant,

A Christian Response to Dungeons & Dragons

The history of role-playing games (RPGs) mirrors the evolution of the Satanic Panic in many respects. Like the Christian campaign that fantasised a Satanic conspiracy threatening society, the RPG hobby—typified by Dungeons & Dragons (D&D)—is an American-born phenomenon that took root in the 1970s, reached its popular peak in the following decade, and gradually receded in the '90s. Although attacks by religious lobbies evolved into a coordinated crusade against the hobby in the 1980s, to suggest that D&D is anything but a game is a fantasy, founded wholly on religious ideology.

If we assume that RPGs weren't the product of secretive Satanic schemes to seduce the unwary into sorcery, their development becomes a little more pedestrian. D&D, uncontested as the pioneering leader in its field, evolved from a 1971 medieval wargame named Chainmail, whose rulebook was penned by Wisconsin

wargamers Gary Gygas and Jeff Perren. Tabletop wargaming is a hobby at least a couple of centuries old, whereby players take on the role of generals, commanding imaginary armies—usually represented by model soldiers—recreating historical battles, with conflicts resolved by dice employing pre-agreed rules. (Later versions evolved into boardgames, with cardboard counters replacing model soldiers.) By the 1970s, wargaming was enjoying something of a renaissance, particularly on U.S. college campuses, where it cross-pollinated with several other bookish hobbies and interests, leading to D&D, and ultimately the gaming subculture.

Foremost among these interests was a burgeoning student cult following for the fantasies of the English author and eminent historian J.R.R. Tolkien. Tolkien's heroic fictional sagas set in the mythic world of Middle Earth—peopled with the elves and dwarves of early Medieval European lore—provided the backdrop for D&D.

Ironically, bearing in mind future controversies, Tolkien's work has often been identified as a manifestation of the author's own deep Christian convictions, evident in the binary, monochrome morality behind his Lord of the Rings trilogy. Tolkien himself downplayed this Christian interpretation, concerned that clumsy evangelism might dilute the broader moral message in his work, but it unquestionably underlies the mythology of Middle Earth, with its simplistic struggle between good and evil.

Few of D&D's Christian critics troubled to delve far enough into the form's origins to encounter this paradox. But in their influential 1987 tract, *A Christian Response to Dungeons & Dragons*, Peter Leithart and George Grant suggest that parents should find more wholesome entertainment for their children to combat the pernicious influence of RPGs, such as reading Christian fiction, including stories by Tolkien.



Role-playing games' detractors
claimed all magic was depicted as evil
– forgetting Gandalf the Grey

“In defending [RPGs] many people have pointed out the obvious fact that most fairy tales (The Brothers Grimm, J.R.R. Tolkien, or C.S. Lewis for example) are full of witches, goblins, and sorcerers,” concede the authors. “But the heroes of these stories aren’t the witches and sorcerers.” Except, of course, that one of Tolkien’s main heroes is Gandalf, a wizard.

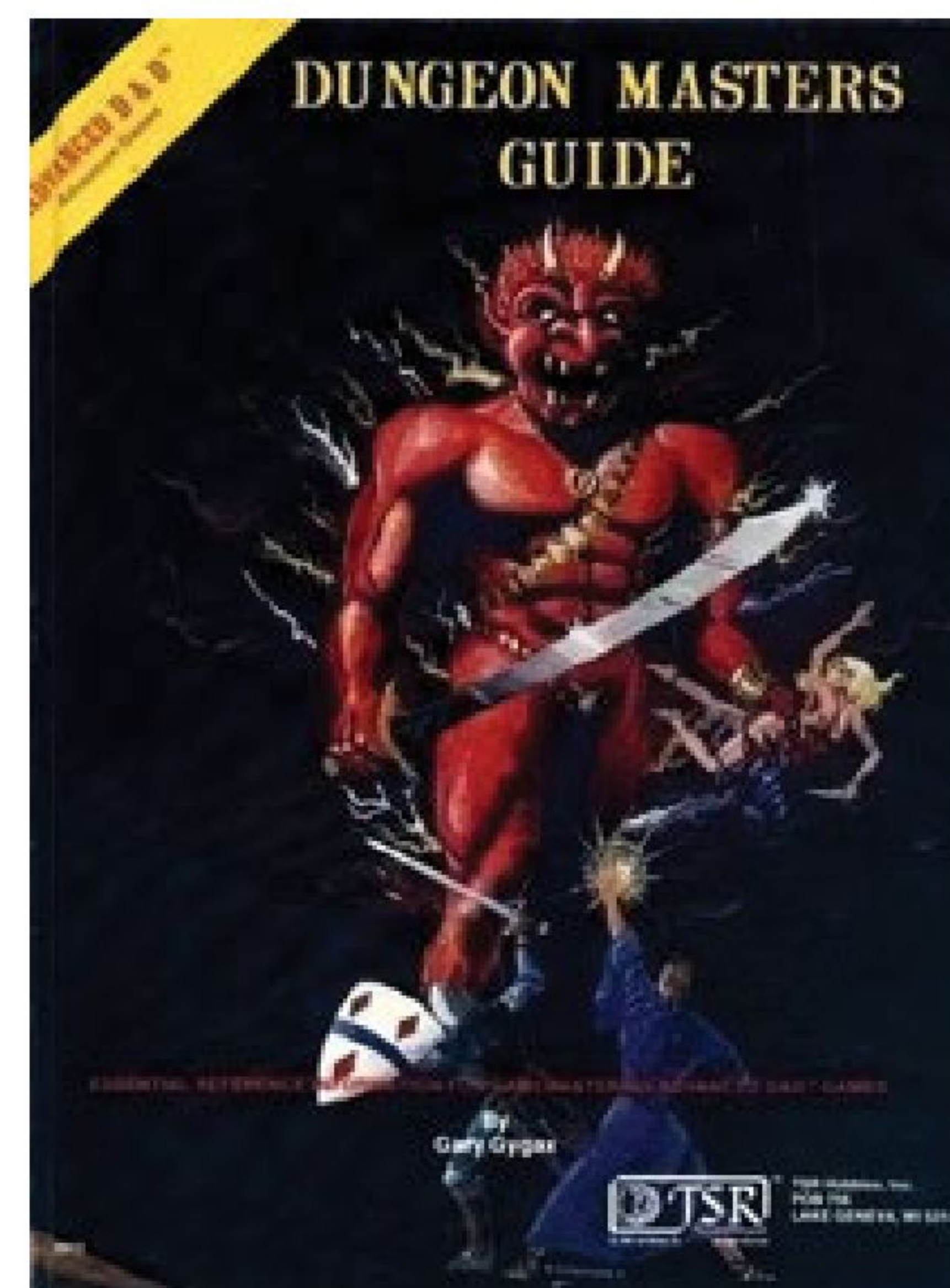
The other factor in the evolution of wargaming into RPGs was a building interest in improvisational theatre and historical re-enactment in the United States. The Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) was founded at Berkeley University in 1966, the next evolution in the Renaissance Fair movement, outdoor historical weekend events on a loose historical theme that had become popular in the U.S. in the 1950s. The SCA took matters a stage further, not by increasing the (routinely dubious) historical accuracy of their events, but by encouraging all attendees to take part and inhabit the fantasy roles of the colourful characters they portrayed, adding an element of amateur dramatics to proceedings. The Society’s brand of interactive American medievalism proved a hit and, by 1970, three “kingdoms” had emerged, all keen

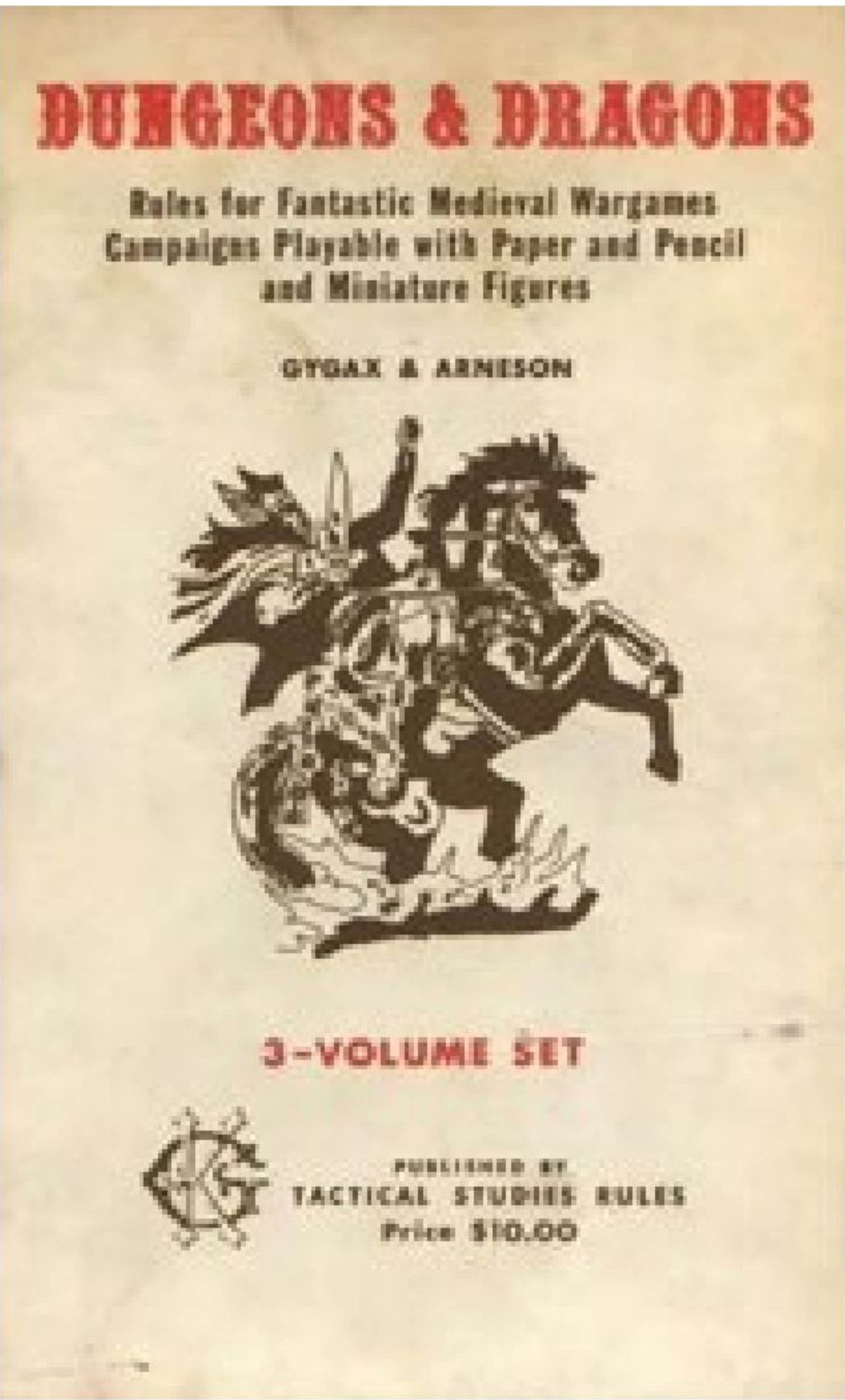
to immerse themselves in a fairytale world of knights, damsels and jesters.

D&D synthesized wargaming, Tolkien fandom and medievalist role-playing to create something authentically original. D&D’s co-creators, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, took their idea to established wargames publishers, but they weren’t interested in something so unorthodox. So, in 1973, they founded Tactical Studies Rules (TSR) as a basement operation to publish the game, and printed 1,000 copies of the rules. They swiftly sold out and, through word-of-mouth, sales grew exponentially as D&D mushroomed from a niche hobby to a commercial phenomenon, inspiring a number of imitators. By 1980, Gygax’s company was effectively a multinational, with the establishment of TSR UK. The following year, the U.S. business monthly Inc. rated it the sixth fastest-growing privately held company in the country with revenues of \$12.9 million and a payroll of 130, projected to rise to \$27 million by 1982.

Yet D&D wasn’t the only cultural phenomena riding the zeitgeist in the U.S. at this point. The Christian Right had also marshalled their forces, successfully organizing to coordinate a campaign that combined political

Below: In its early days, *Dungeons & Dragons* came heavily under fire for its supposedly corruptive and Satanic content, with the resulting moral panic threatening to engulf it entirely





Above: In order to publish the game, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson founded Tactical Studies Rules (TSR) to publish the game. The first rulebook's 1,000 copies swiftly sold out

author Dr. Gary North:
Dr. North's academic credentials are impeccable—at least superficially. He's an Associated Scholar of the Mises Institute, with a PhD in history from California University, who's served as the director of seminars for the Foundation for Economic Education, and worked as a research assistant for a Republican Congressman. North's book *None Dare Call it Witchcraft* is a fairly unorthodox history of the occult by most standards, not least because North not only equates occultism with humanism and liberalism, but also believes magic literally exists, and identifies it as an urgent threat to the modern world.

North's a prolific writer, with over 50 books to his name in a wide variety of fields. What unifies them is a radical right-wing evangelical agenda, which includes advocating Old Testament punishment for "crimes" like homosexuality and abortion. North has a particular interest in education. "We must use the doctrine of religious liberty to gain independence for Christian schools until we train up a generation of people who know that there is no religious neutrality, no neutral law, no neutral education, and no neutral civil government," he explained in a piece for the 1982 Christianity & Civilization symposium. "Then they will get busy in constructing a Bible-based social, political and religious order which finally denies the religious liberty of the enemies of God."

Others have claimed that occultism figured in the very nativity of D&D. In his article "Straight Talk on Dungeons & Dragons," Christian personality William Schnoebelen claims to

have been the game's occult advisor during his disreputable past as a "witch high priest":

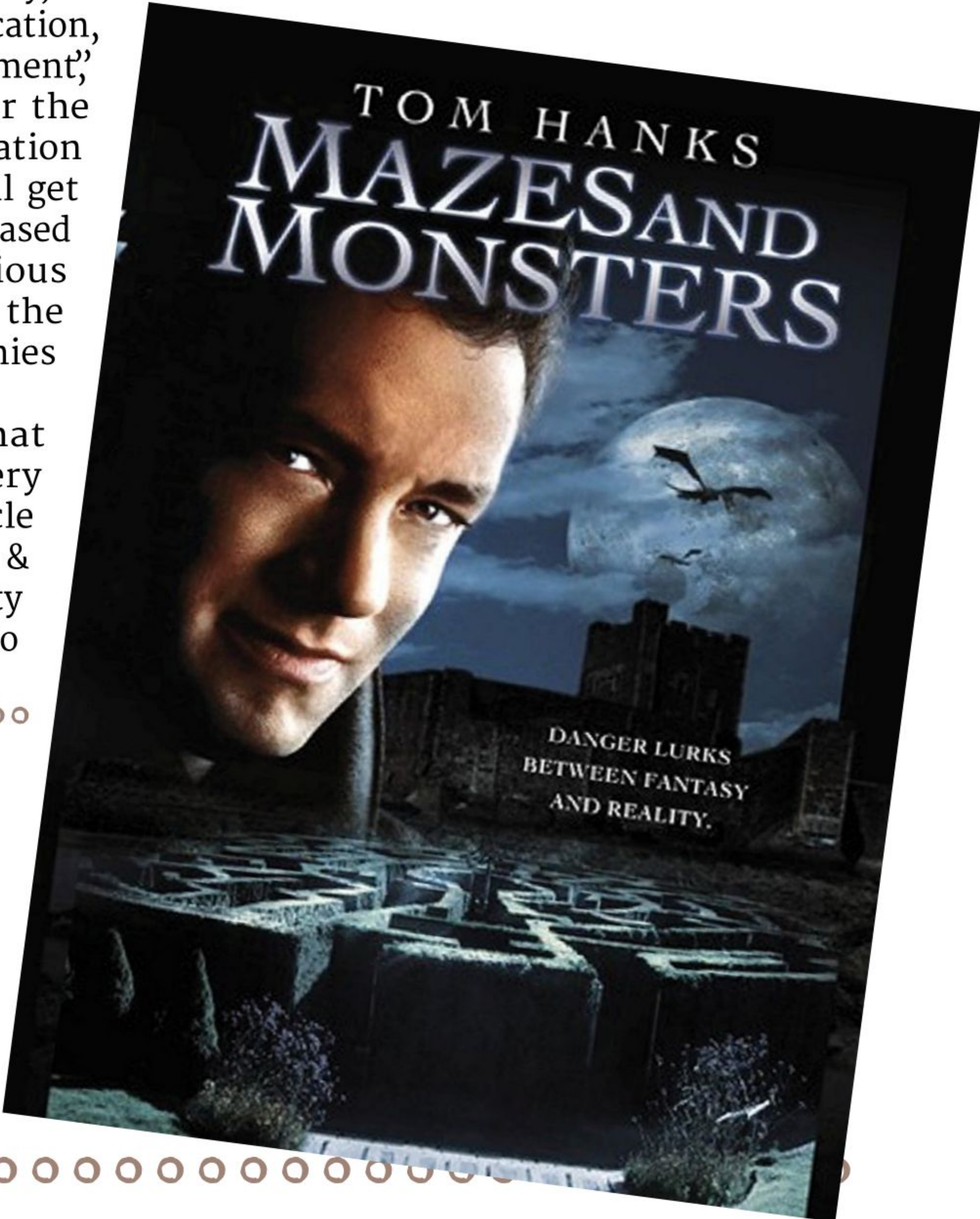
Schnoebelen's part of a very colourful cast who made up the ranks of the anti-RPG crusade. His claims to have been a senior member of a secret Satanic sect, before being rescued for Christ by being "born again," are a familiar feature in the supposed CVs of many of the more flamboyant evangelical preachers. Schnoebelen is unusual both in explicitly stating that he was effectively the occult advisor behind D&D, as well as claiming to have belonged to a large number of unholy organizations, which (according to his official biography) include "Freemasonry, cultural spiritualism (Voodoo, etc.), Thelema (the Aleister Crowley cult), Rosicrucianism, the Catholic priesthood, Mormonism, and various Eastern philosophies." It's when our hero graduates beyond the highest grades of these—in his view implicitly anti-Christian disciplines—that things get really interesting.

Schnoebelen claims to have joined the Church of Satan, an organization that exists (I'm a member), before

conservatism with Evangelical beliefs, culminating in the foundation of the Moral Majority by televangelist Jerry Falwell in 1979. The following year, Republican candidate Ronald Reagan won a landslide victory in the presidential election on a platform dominated by the Christian Right agenda. America's Christian soldiers were on the march, eager to do battle with anyone or anything that didn't fit with their aggressively puritanical vision of the future, and the RPG hobby was drawn into the building culture war.

Anti-D&D advocates are often notably circumspect in declaring their own positions on the spiritual map, frequently concealing some highly suspect ideological baggage, and prone to quote partisan ideologues as unbiased experts. For example, many tracts and books attacking RPGs reproduce the following quote from

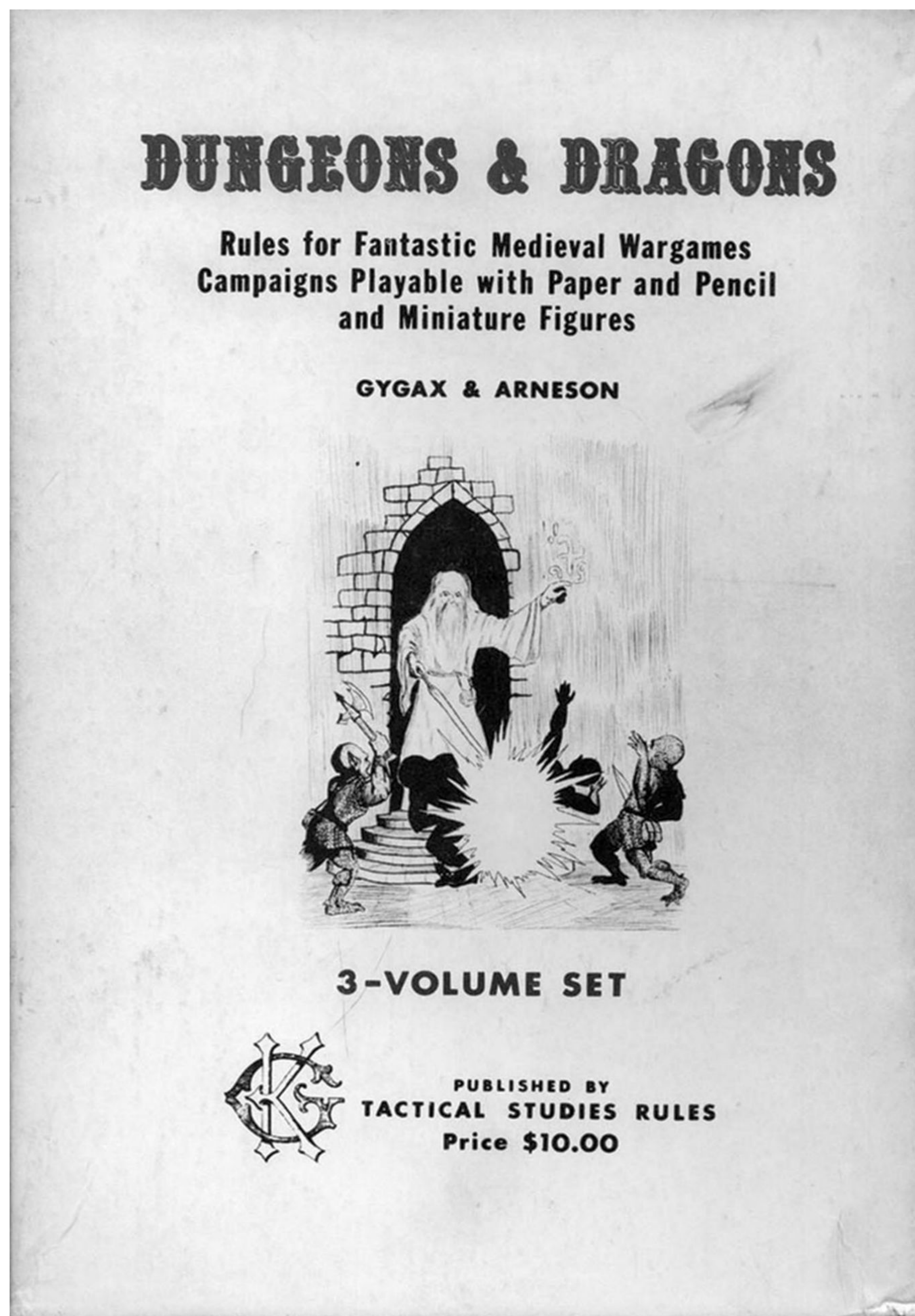
Right: The 1982 TV movie *Mazes And Monsters* – starring Tom Hanks – remains a negative depiction of role playing and the supposed consequences of playing



moving onto “hardcore” Satanism, which is more suspect because of his autobiographical accounts of close encounters with literal demons. From there he claims that the next step was to choose between becoming a vampire or a werewolf (he choose the former in 1979 as he’d heard lycanthropy could be unpleasant). While Schnoebelen stops short of claiming he literally became a member of the undead, he doesn’t stop far short, and says he craved and drank human blood, slept in a coffin, and dreaded sunlight and garlic. Schnoebelen was “born again” in 1984, ready to dedicate his life to combating his former occult allies, including the fiendish forces behind D&D.

Schnoebelen may be among the more obviously eccentric characters who led the anti-RPG crusade in the 1980s, but he is in several significant respects not atypical. He has a tendency to slip into magical thinking, whereby the supernatural is assumed to be real, which lies behind many of the claims from foes of D&D. He also displays a conspiratorial viewpoint, depicting everything as a covert struggle between otherworldly divine and infernal forces. I’ll leave the reader to make their own conclusions on Schnoebelen’s plausibility and reliability as an expert, although, in fairness, much of Schnoebelen’s writing on the occult begins by at least nailing a few actual facts before plunging deep into more bizarre and contentious territory, suggesting he has at least done some homework, which is more than most of his peers can claim.

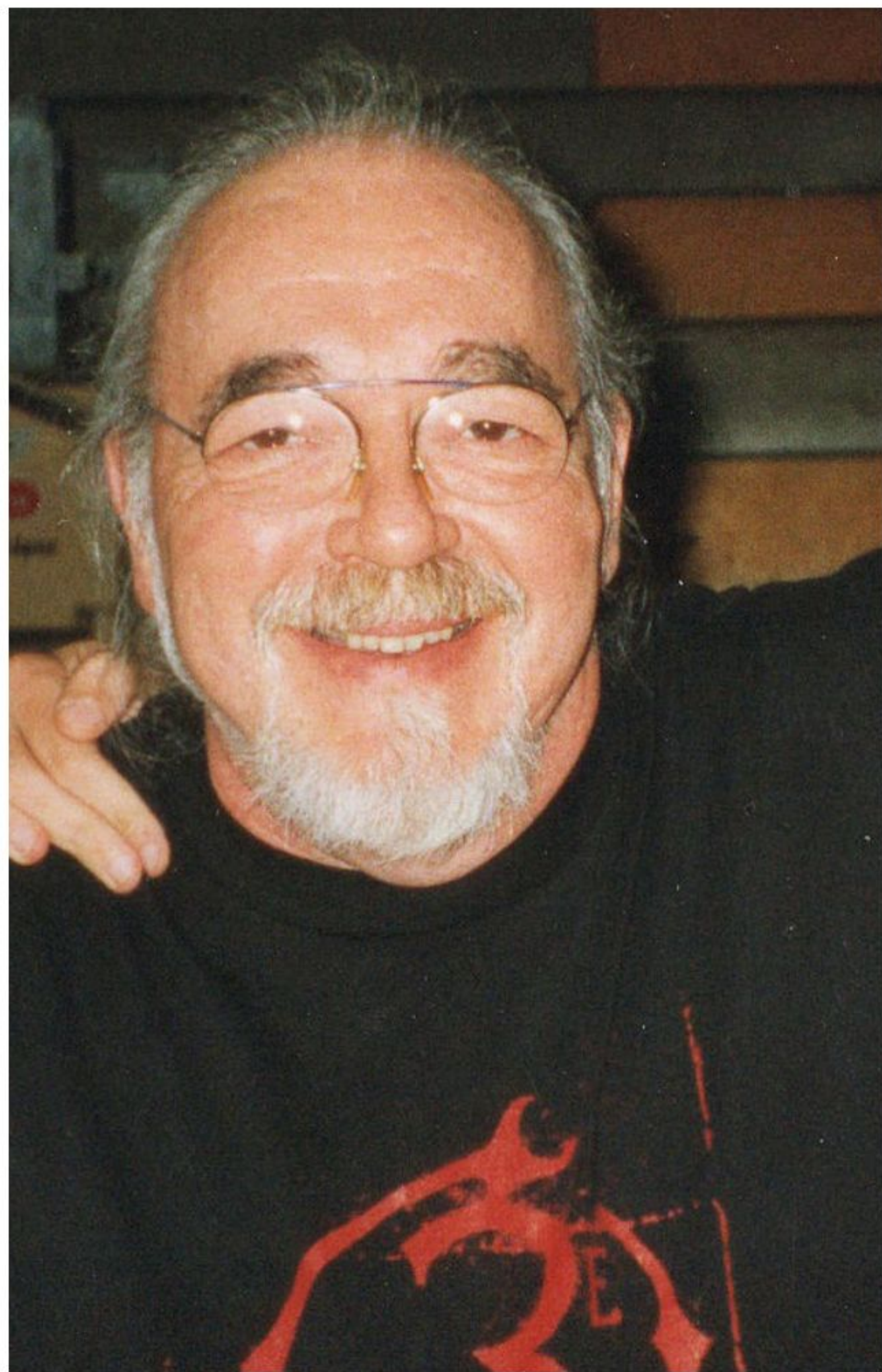
But before Dr. North and Schnoebelen’s own inquisition into RPGs, the movement seems to have largely gained traction following the 1979 disappearance of University of Michigan student James Dallas Egbert. Clearly a troubled teenager, Egbert’s interest in D&D appears to have been casual, but circumstances conspired to make the 17-year-old the first poster-boy of the anti-RPG crusade. An academic prodigy but socially inept, Egbert was under heavy family pressure to achieve at



college, struggled with his sexual identity, and had begun taking drugs as a coping strategy. In August, 1979, he disappeared and, after campus authorities failed to locate him, Egbert’s uncle employed private investigator William Dear to find the boy. Dear worked out that Egbert had taken refuge in the steam tunnels under the university, and publicly

speculated that Egbert was acting out D&D fantasies. In reality, the tormented and possibly suicidal teen was just looking for somewhere secluded to self-harm.

However, the detective’s theory—referencing a hobby still regarded as suspiciously weird by the mainstream—captured the prurient imagination of the media. For the first time, RPGs



Above: *Dungeons & Dragons* co-creator Gary Gygax

Below: The game found itself blamed for a number of tragedies, such as the suicide of 16-year-old Irving Pulling (which you can read more about in the full essay)

entered the national consciousness, but for all the wrong reasons. Dear located Egbert within a month, but the tormented teenager took his own life a year later. When the detective revisited the case in print in 1985, he confessed that the D&D angle had been a mistake, but he left the myth to take root because he felt that it was less damaging to Egbert's surviving relatives, particularly his younger brother Doug. Dear explained that he was respecting James Egbert's wishes, who did not want Doug to endure "cruel asides from his classmates and friends about his 'faggot brother, the dope addict.'"

Media panics come and go, and the Egbert story might have evaporated like so many other sensationalist stories had it not caught the attention of New York author Rona Jaffe. Jaffe identified the case as good material for a punchy, topical novel and, concerned that another writer might come to the same conclusion, worked quickly. Her book was published in September of 1981 as *Mazes and Monsters* (presumably to avoid obvious legal issues). Unsurprisingly considering its hasty conception, Jaffe's novel was hardly a sound reflection on the Egbert case or RPGs in general, though, as a work of fiction, why should it be? But it certainly fed the climate of hostility building around D&D.

Yet, once again, Jaffe's book would

have enjoyed little cultural resonance had it not caught the attention of executives at CBS. *Mazes and Monsters* was adapted as a made-for-TV movie, debuting on the network in late 1982, that offered an early lead role for a young Tom Hanks. The Egbert tragedy had now broken almost totally free from any factual mooring and entered popular mythology. User reviews on sites like IMDb today largely recommend *Mazes and Monsters* for being laughably bad, with its crass, inaccurate portrayal of a harmless hobby that lends the film a certain camp, comical charm. Though other user reviews also recall it as a malign influence, shown to them as kids by well-meaning but naïve adults to warn of the dangers of D&D.

While *Mazes and Monsters* is often remembered as the flagship of the anti-RPG crusade, religion is conspicuously absent from both the book and film. The titular, fictionalized RPG is portrayed as having a special appeal to oddballs and misfits, but the threat it poses is to their mental stability, not their immortal souls. When the most fragile character—played by Hanks and clearly loosely modelled on Egbert—loses his mind, the game may be the trigger, but grief over his dead brother is the underlying cause. In *Mazes and Monsters*, the danger of RPGs is simply the psychological dangers of becoming too involved in a fantasy world. This is often the first line of attack by anti-RPG crusaders, aware that their more overtly religious, irrational criticisms of the hobby can alienate those who don't share their Christian agenda.

On his exemplary RPG advocacy website, *The Escapist*, William J. Walton identifies 1980 as when the first shots were fired in the religious crusade launched against the hobby—the year following Egbert's disappearance in the steam tunnels (though some Evangelicals had referenced the game as early as 1978). His site links to a lecture from Reverend James R. Cotter, a tract by Fundamentalist Christian preacher Albert James Dager and a report from the *New York Times* all from that year. "Due to a long tradition among preachers of prolific cutting and pasting, much of the rhetoric seen

SATURDAY OKLAHOMAN & TIMES

March 23, 1985

Groups Say Fantasy Game Responsible for Teen Suicide

LAKE GENEVA, Wis. (AP) — Millions of high school and college students play the fantasy game "Dungeons and Dragons," fighting hobgoblins and green slime. Two national groups, however, claim the popular game is far from harmless, blaming it for the deaths of as many as a dozen young people.

The National Coalition on Television Violence and Battered About Dungeons and Dragons (BADD) have urged their members to write their congressional representatives asking the government to declare the game hazardous.

Lou Brott, spokesman for the Consumer Product Safety Commission of the FTC, said the commission has no jurisdiction in the matter.

Dieter Sturm, a spokesman for TSR Hobbies of Lake Geneva, Wis., which makes the game, said "Dungeons and Dragons" is

only a board game and no more violent than other classic board games such as "Monopoly."

Sturm, director of corporate relations for TSR, derided the groups' proposal to put a warning label on the game.

"You're going to have to label everything from soup to nuts," he said. "What are you going to do, put a label on your dog, saying this animal might bite if you're not careful?"

"Dungeons and Dragons" players are assigned a character with specific traits. Guided by a "dungeon master" who has a book with more information than the players do, the players strive to win a treasure while avoiding various monsters.

About 3 million to 4 million people, mostly young males in their late teens and early 20s, play the game, according to TSR.

Pat Pulling of Rich-



Patricia Pulling holds a photo of her son along with several books and games from "Dungeons and Dragons," which she blames for the suicide of her son, Irving.

mond, Va., started BADD after her 16-year-old son, Irving, shot himself to death in 1982. Mrs. Pulling said her son killed himself hours

after a curse was placed on him during a game of D&D at his high school. She sued TSR, its chairman and the two teachers who led the game,

but the \$10 million suit was dismissed by the Circuit Court of Hanover County, Va.

"We know D&D was involved with his death because of the notes (on his game sheets) he left behind," Mrs. Pulling said in a telephone interview.

Mrs. Pulling said her son was "perfectly normal" before he played the game, which was sponsored by the school's program for talented and gifted children.

But some of his classmates later said that Pulling had personal problems not associated with the game.

"Many millions of kids are sold Dungeons and Dragons," Thomas Radecki, head of the coalition and a psychiatrist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, said in a telephone interview. "The very least they deserve is the other side of the story — that kids are getting murdered

because of this game."

Radecki's group lists at least a dozen deaths, including five suicides, that it says were connected with the game. Radecki said the game can wrap impressionable teen-agers in a dangerous web of fantasy.

"Aggression research shows that the more violent fantasies someone has, the more likely he is to act it out in real life," he said. "In this game, you're ready at any moment to be assaulted by deadly force."

The game, he admitted, may not spur everyone to violence.

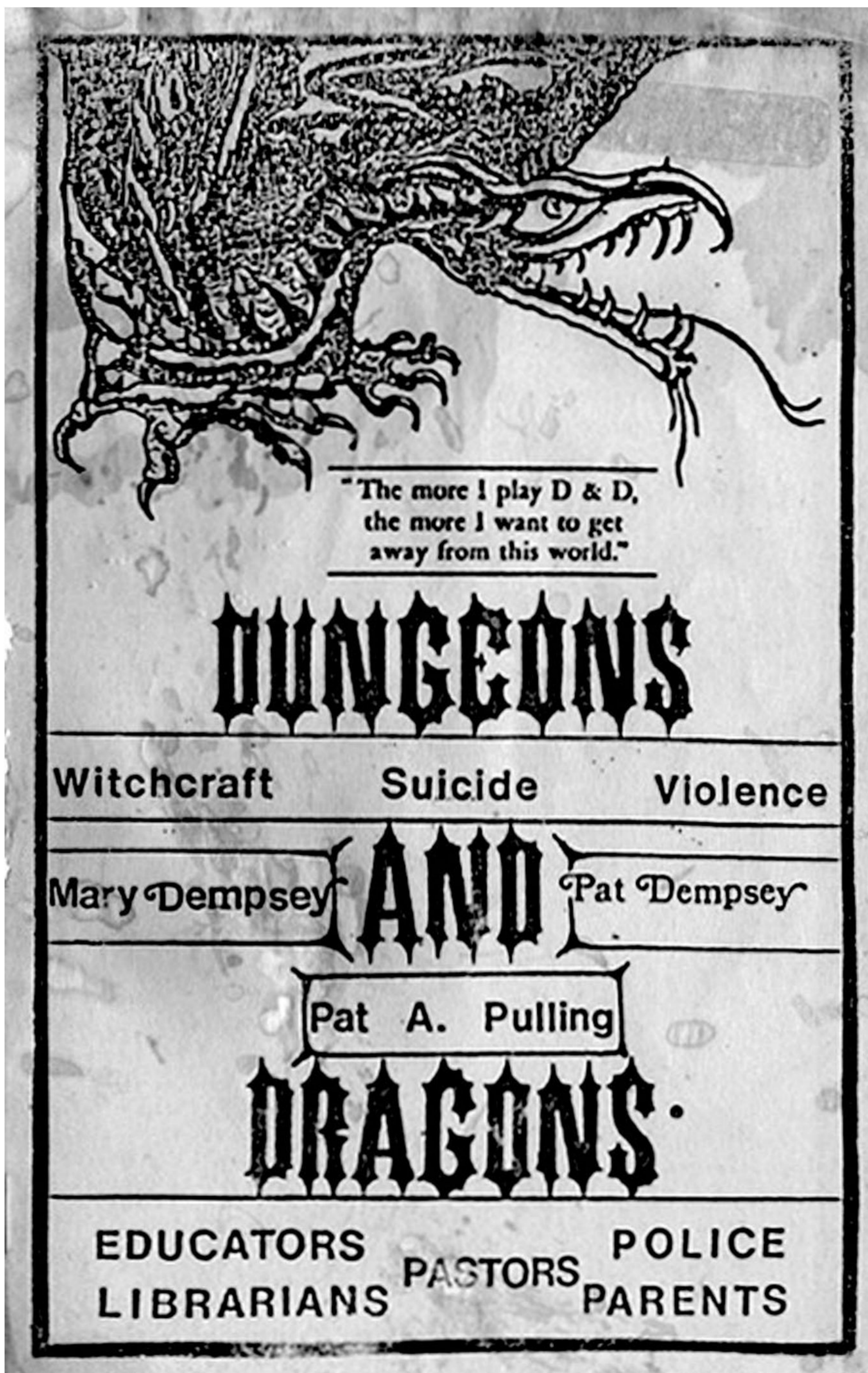
"It doesn't mean every player is going to go out and kill himself or somebody else," he said. "... There has to be some tendency there (for violence) too."

Sturm emphasized that, in at least one of the incidents cited by Radecki — a murder-suicide involving two teen-age boys in Colorado — police later said the game had nothing to

do with the deaths.

"If you take (the game) outside the table context, you're not playing Dungeons and Dragons, you're playing something else," Sturm said. "This is nothing more than a game. It's played around a table, it's not played in real life."

The average D&D player is 12-24 years old and is male, TSR said. In the mid-1970s when the game originated, it attracted primarily college-aged students.



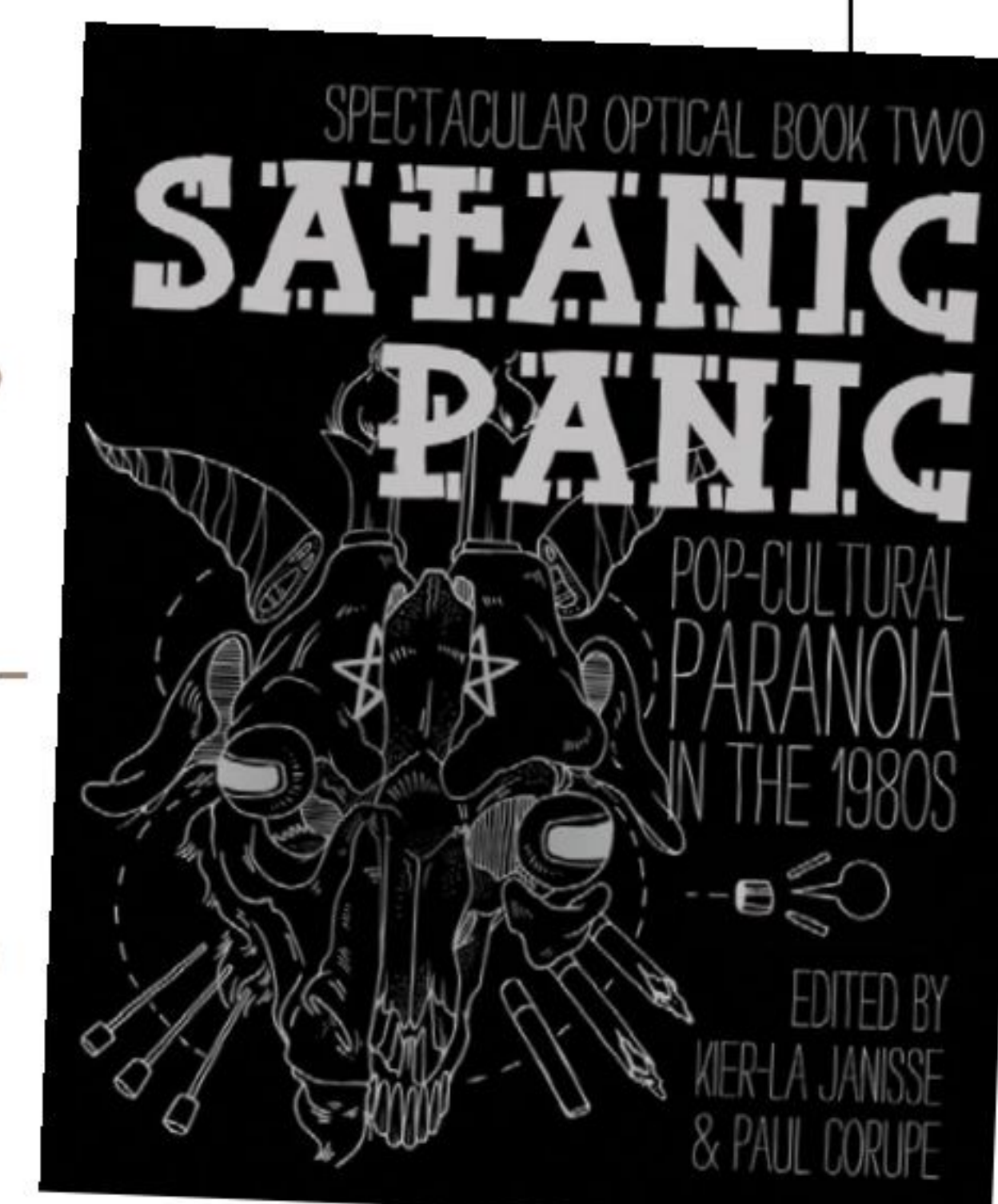
in religious anti-gaming materials can be traced backwards to the work of these two men," notes Walton. They're certainly indicative of the charges made against RPGs in the ensuing crusade, and represent a blueprint for the battles to come. Cotter's

lecture, dated September 16, 1980, is a catalogue of inaccuracies about D&D. He insists that a character's "only means of defence is the magical powers which you bought and rolled the dice for at the beginning of the game, and the magical powers and

strengths of those who are travelling with you," which misrepresents the leading role taken by swashbuckling swordplay in most RPGs. Emphasising the significance of magic in D&D was endemic among Christian critics, symptomatic of their inability to distinguish between the imaginary/fictional sorcery found in books, films and games, and the "real" magic of contemporary occultist practice and history. The same inability to distinguish between fictional invention and any kind of authentic historic belief or contemporary practice has characterized more recent crusades, such as Christian campaigns to have Harry Potter books banned from school libraries.

Cotter spends most of the rest of his lecture subjecting D&D to biblical scrutiny. As, for obvious chronological reasons, the Bible has nothing to say on the matter (playing RPGs nearly 2,000 years before they were invented is not one of Christ's recorded miracles), Cotter resorts to comparing sentences from D&D manuals—taken out of context—with reams of biblical quotations. Shakespeare's quote, "The Devil can cite scripture for his purpose," leaps to mind, as any half-capable commentator could find biblical quotes to oppose or support pretty much anything. Cotter concludes with a "warning from Peter telling us to be on the alert for a 'roaring lion', but at times Satan disguises himself and becomes a cute cuddly kitten. That's what he had done in the game Dungeons & Dragons."

You can read the rest of 'Dicing With The Devil: The Crusade Against Gaming' by Gavin Baddeley in *Satanic Panic: Pop-Cultural Paranoia In The 1980s*, published by Fab Press and available to buy now. 



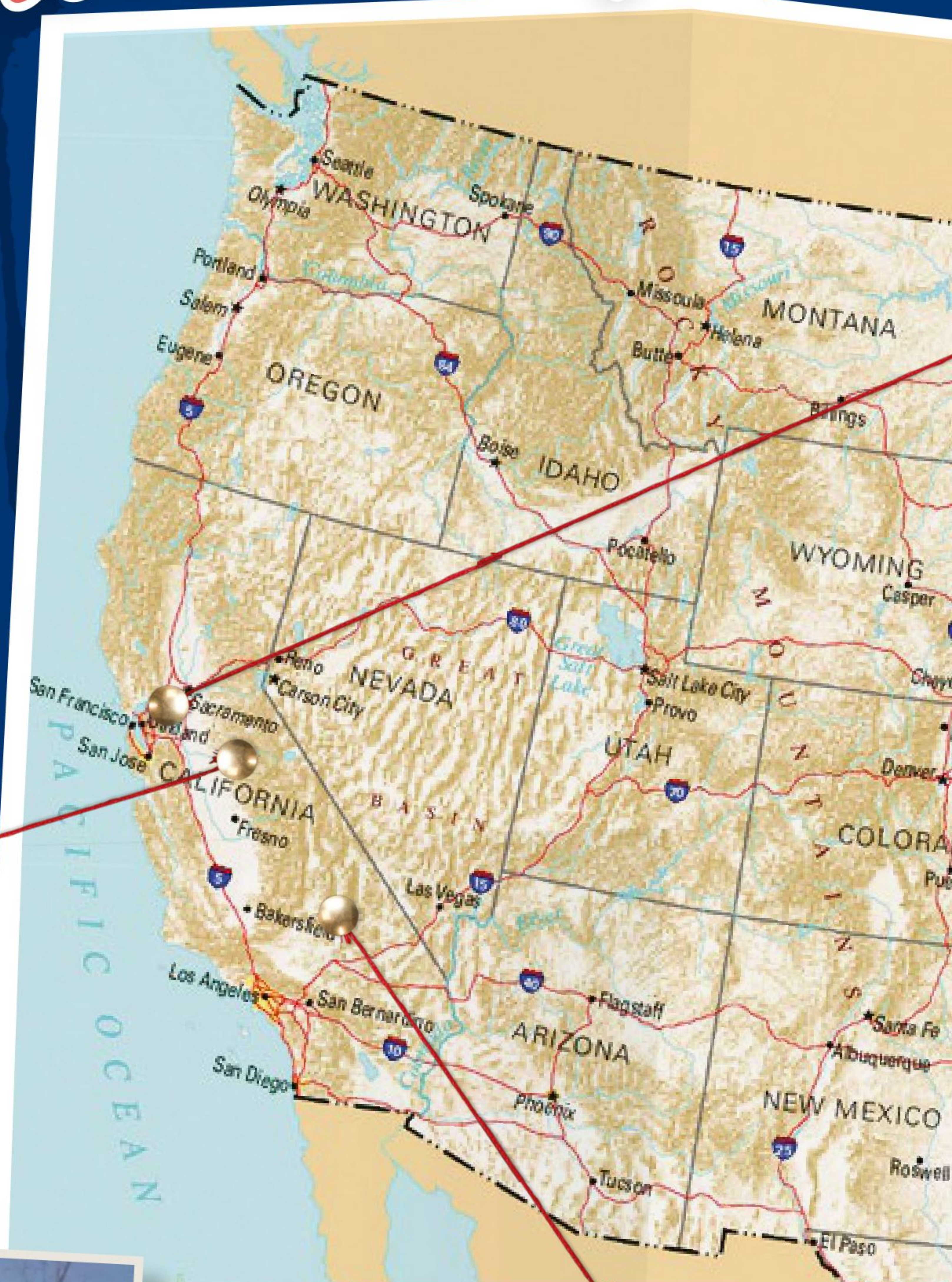
80S *Movie Small Towns Map*

YOUR GUIDE TO THE MOST MYSTERIOUS TOWNS IN THE UNITED STATES...

Want to experience the heart of the United States? Want to work out what *REALLY* makes America great? Then dust off your travel bag, fill up that gas tank, and get yourself down to the following locations to experience what goes on in these stunning samples of small-town Americana....

Santa Carla, California (*The Lost Boys*)

Sleep all day, party all night – that’s the motto of the hip young partygoers of coastal resort town Santa Carla. We don’t know how they do it – it’s like they’ve been keeping the party going for decades. Make sure you know your limits if you think you can keep up with David and his gang – people tend to not be ‘quite’ the same after a night on the town with them. Oh, and don’t worry about all those missing people posters...



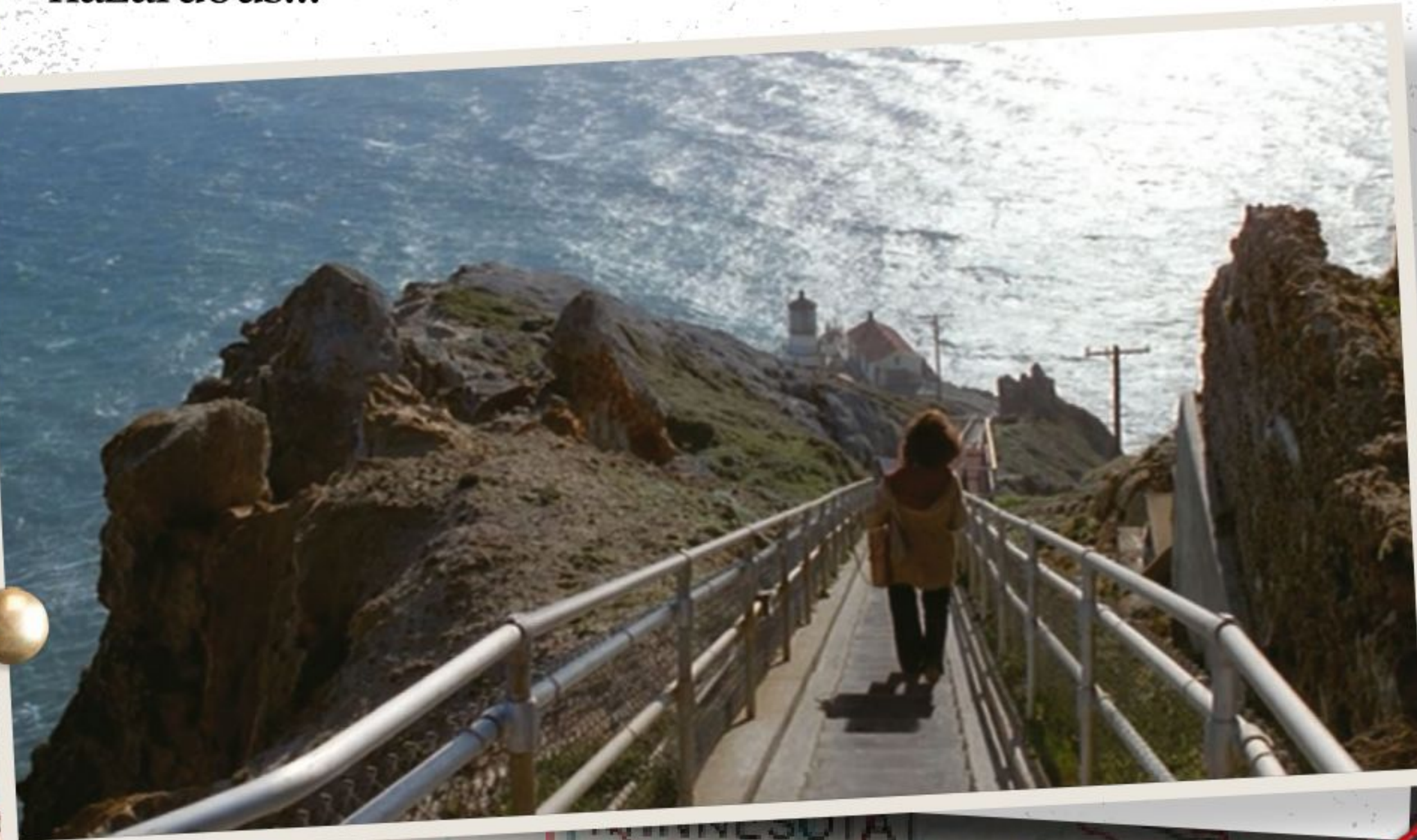
Cuesta Verde, Orange County, California (*Poltergeist*)

This place has had a bit of a bad rep over the years, what with all the melting walls, earthquakes, toys coming to life and general improbable goings-on, but really what’s to dislike? Sure, it was build on a cemetery, but we moved the headstones – the dead aren’t going to make a fuss, right? Right?



Antonio Bay, California (**The Fog**)

Welcome to Antonio Bay! You'll find you're here just in time to celebrate the town's 100th anniversary. You can learn all about the rich history, and how its founders built it up with little more than some can-do spirit and true grit (and a large quantity of gold, although we're not quite sure whey they got it from). Watch the shroud of mist coming in though – could making driving hazardous...



Hinkley Hills, Des Moines, Iowa (**The 'Burbs**)

Stepping into Hinkley Hills is just like stepping into a time warp – one involving a slice of small-town Americana in which everyone knows each other, everyone knows what's going on, and their biggest worries are whether their neighbour has the better lawn. Just watch out for those Klopeks – there's something strange going on, not to mention they're clearly not from around these parts. God we love this street...



Kingston Falls, New York (**Gremlins**)

So we're bending the rules a little bit here – New York isn't exactly a 'small town', as such. Still, it looks like something out of a postcard, so we'll hasten its inclusion here. It's just like it was plonked in from the middle of nowhere, everyone's friendly – except that mean old Mrs Deagle, she'll get what's coming – and we heard that lovable old Randall Peltzer returned from Chinatown with a gift for his son, Billy, which we're sure he won't mind showing you. Just be careful with that water...



Elm Street, Springfield, Ohio (**A Nightmare On Elm Street**)

We know what you've heard, and to be honest you'd be right to raise an eyebrow at this inclusion – home to notorious serial killer Freddy Krueger, and god-knows how-many unsolved murder cases. Still, lightning can't carry on repeatedly striking the same place, right? Anyhow, make sure you take some Hypnocil before turning in for the night – you don't want those bad thoughts catching up with you...



FEATURE

TWIN SHRIEKS

MILES HAMER COUNTS
DOWN THE FIVE SCARIEST
MOMENTS FROM TWIN
PEAKS SO FAR...

I'll see you again in 25 years," once promised Laura Palmer, teen murder victim. It appears the girl whose tragic death provided the central mystery of David Lynch and Mark Frost's groundbreaking Nineties television show is keeping her promise. Because in the giant's words, "It is happening again", as at the end of this month, *Twin Peaks* is returning to the small screen.

Known for its unusual blend of detective drama, soap opera, surrealism and comedy, the show also carried regular dollops of dark-as-you-like full-on horror. While we ponder what delicious unpleasantness Season Three might bring, here are the five scariest moments that had us all crying out for our mums.

Beware spoilers. And, erm, owls...



5

BEDSIDE BOB

SEASON 1, 'TRACES TO NOWHERE'

The first, but certainly not the last, mention of the series' signature villain in this list. It's also the first proper look we get at the denim-clad demon during the programme's run. Yes, he had a tiny cameo in the pilot, but considering it was a minuscule mistake, viewers in the Nineties would have needed an eagle eye and a damn fine CRT TV to spot him.

If you don't know the story by now, settle in. Set dresser Frank Silva was caught accidentally in the closing moments of the pilot episode, popping up in the corner of a mirror belonging to Laura's equal parts bereaved and disturbed mum, Sarah. Lynch, known to employ on-set circumstance into his scripts (such

as the autopsy room's flickering lights), let the fleeting reflection stay. The result? Setting up the show with its silver-haired bogeyman and primary antagonist.

On paper, Killer BOB shouldn't work at all – a scrawny, middle-aged fella dressed like a Status Quo roadie, it's not a look that immediately screams horror. One horrendous, inexplicable zoom into his bug-eyed sneer at the foot of Laura's bed changes all that. It's jarring, disorientating and unforgivably creepy.

And don't even get us started on that crawl across the living room directly towards the viewers in Season Two. Over two decades later and we still haven't recovered.

4

HEEEERE'S...LEO!

SEASON 2, 'CHECKMATE'

Leo Johnson is the worst; a volatile, wife-beating, coke-dealing trucker who could suck the joy out of a room just by placing a photo of himself in it. Why the lovely Shelly married him is a mystery to rival who killed Laura Palmer (though given her affair with Bobby, perhaps she just goes for bad boys?).

So, following the character's shooting, it comes as something of a relief to find him incapacitated. Confined to a wheelchair and unable to say anything except, bafflingly, "new shoes", his expressionless inertia gradually slides into something even more terrifying than his former snarling fury. The pressure-cooker terror of anticipation that he could spring back to his homicidal self at any moment becomes almost unbearable.

Holding an ill-advised party to celebrate his incapacity was therefore probably not Shelly and Bobby's brightest idea. Taunting the comatose cripple with a birthday hat, kazoo and cream cake smeared across his face, it's only more vengeful grist to the madman's mill for when Leo gets back his murderous mojo.

When he does, in a petrifying cliffhanger that sees him waiting to pounce on poor Shelley, it's a pulse-racing boo-scare. The following episode amplifies to *The Shining* levels of axe-wielding mania.



3

RONETTE'S RECOLLECTION

SEASON 2, 'MAY THE GIANT BE WITH YOU'

Season Two's opener hunkers down into unsettling territory right away and rarely budes from that tone; the now white-haired Leland Palmer suffers a hysterical breakdown, a mysterious giant warns of duplicitous owl-kind, and a dim-witted elderly waiter fails to notice the injuries of a seriously wounded Agent Cooper on his bedroom floor. So yeah, it puts you on edge somewhat.

So when it ends with BOB victim Ronette waking up from her injury-aided coma to recall the terrible events that put her in the hospital in the first place, our nerves are already approaching total failure. The scene that follows is a sudden, loud burst of violence and inhumanity that shakes the viewer by the senses and doesn't let go.

Thanks to her vision, we can now witness Laura Palmer's demise first hand: Killer BOB pounding his fists into her repeatedly and remorselessly, crossed with a truly startling shot of the grinning marauder running straight towards the camera, intercut with Laura's twisted, screaming, bloodied face, and finally freezing on the frenzied, feral howl of the triumphant killer. It's a heart-racing moment that lingers long after the credits have rolled.





2 BACK TO BLACK (LODGE)

SEASON 2, 'BEYOND LIFE AND DEATH'

It's the black-hearted companion piece to Cooper's Red Room dream: a disorientating nightmare where our ever-dependable hero finally starts to unravel mentally. Yup, Agent Dale Cooper has finally checked in to the Black Lodge.

Between the red drapes, he meets a roster of *Peaks* characters, including The Man from Another Place (the diminutive host in the scarlet suit), the elderly waiter, the giant, an unhinged Windom Earle, and a cochlea-shattering Laura Palmer.

Finally, making ill-advised trade with a ravenous soul-devouring BOB, Cooper's horrendous, surreal journey ends in a mirror-shattering revelation that we have waited over 25 years for a follow-up to.

Lynch is excellent at making this material terrifying thanks to his knack of taking the everyday and twisting it ever so slightly. Characters laugh too hard and for too long. Coffee thickens to a gloopy paste. Speech is backwards yet, well, isn't. Eye colours are slightly off. It's *Twin Peaks*' terror in a nutshell: the series' iconography couched in the homespun apple pie of everyday Americana, but just a beat away from reality and the off-kilter mix of suburbia and savagery.

If it was all pure avant-garde surrealism and irrational non-sequiturs then there'd be no tangible sense of terror (hello, *Inland Empire*). But Lynch and Frost's reassuring recognition hooks the horror to something much more substantial – and consequently, far more scary.

1 BOB'S YOUR UNCLE. UNFORTUNATELY

SEASON 2, 'LONELY SOULS'

In revealing the show's central mystery, *Twin Peaks* punished its viewers for ever wanting the answer in the first place. Because even now, over two and a half decades on, Killer BOB's possession of Leland Palmer and vicious murder of niece Maddy is a devastating piece of drama.

The often unstable and always hyperactive father of Laura is unmasked as BOB's physical host in a truly petrifying sequence that sees the lank-haired killer reflected in the family mirror. Cutting between the two, his ferocious attack on poor Madeline is

shockingly, overwhelmingly brutal. BOB's guttural growling, the nightmarish slowed-down pacing, and the constant flashes of bright white light conspire to dizzying, disturbing effect, all set to the impatient flick of a record-needle skip.

Quite how they got away with it on early Nineties network TV is anybody's guess, but it is as horrifying as it is utterly brilliant. In just one scene Lynch and Frost conjured up material far scarier and more affecting than anything that has been managed in an entire franchise-worth of *Saw* films.



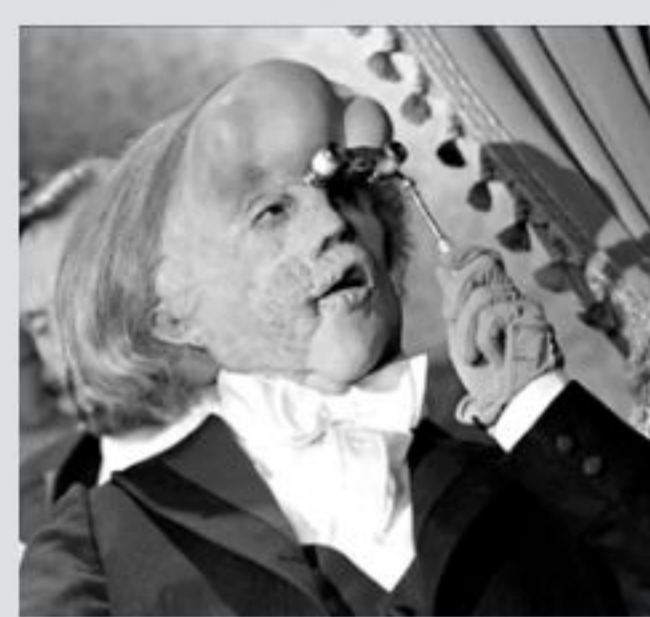
Alt-Horror

Lynch has famously never directed a 'straight' horror. But the following scenes from his filmography have all earned a place in the genre's hall of fame...



Eraserhead
(1977)

A parenting nightmare from start to finish, *Eraserhead* is the closest the auteur director gets to the genre, even if its arthouse sensibilities often stop it from being considered pure horror. Its most repellent and troubling moment comes as high-haired Henry attempts to carve a miniature chicken. It recoils, bleeds heavily, and one of his dinner party guests starts wailing into thin air.



The Elephant Man
(1980)

Lynch's otherwise sympathetic biopic of deformed circus act Joseph Merrick (re-christened 'John' here) nevertheless has its moments of wonky fantasia typical of the director. The opening dream-like sequence soon turns into a very bad nightmare indeed as we witness Merrick's pregnant mother trampled by a herd of stomping elephants.



Blue Velvet
(1986)

Starring Kyle MacLachlan, this feels like a dry run for *Twin Peaks*. Nothing is more bizarre or disconcerting than Dennis Hopper's gas-chugging psychopath, Frank. Terrorising Isabella Rossellini in a violent encounter while mewling obscenities like a baby, it's certainly far scarier than anything he was up against in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, filmed in the same year.



Lost Highway
(1997)

Lynch's bifurcated puzzler elicits discomfort throughout its run time. But there are few moments as disconcerting as Bill Pullman's spooky encounter with the pale-faced partygoer (looking not at all unlike Death from Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*), who's in two places at once. It's all sort of shivers, and successfully sets the tone for what's to come.



Mulholland Dr.
(2001)

Winkie's is the less than appetising name for the diner outside of which Lynch's most notorious jump scare takes place. A tense masterpiece of timing, sound and the grotesque provokes shock every single time, adding yet another layer to the already myriad patchwork of arguably the director's most talked-about production – after *Twin Peaks*, of course.



ARC — OF THE — COVENANT

Prometheus was just a warm-up – Alien: Covenant marks Ridley Scott’s true return to the universe that made his name and forever altered the sci-fi landscape. **Steve O’Brien looked at how things are going to go wrong this time...**

INTERVIEWS: **JORDAN FARLEY**

Ridley Scott, director, lest we forget, of the very first *Alien* film in 1979, had been ruminating about returning to the universe he helped create for a long time before *Prometheus*. When that movie finally docked in 2012, it had the spine-crushing weight of a decade’s expectation on its shoulders.

But while it did studio-pleasing business at the box office, many *Alien* fans welcomed it with an almighty shrug. Rather than give us a blood-drenched *Alien* prequel, Scott had made a lofty-minded, original SF film set in the *Alien* universe. Disregarding the legitimate criticisms of Damon Lindelof’s rambling narrative, the movie simply wasn’t what *Alien* junkies had been waiting for. It didn’t even have a Xenomorph in it, apart from some early version of the creature in the movie’s closing moments.

So when Ridley Scott talked excitedly about a *Prometheus 2*, it was difficult for some *Alien*

“Alien fans are definitely not going to feel robbed on this occasion”

buffs to care. But though *Prometheus* had ended up grossing over \$400 million, it seems Fox was thinking that there was potentially even more moolah out there for a sequel that dialled down the *Prometheus*-ness and into its *Alien*-ness.

“Fox were doing their demographics,” reflects Scott, “and said, ‘They really miss the *Alien*, and this, and this, and this. Is there no way we can bring it back in the next one?’ I said, ‘Of course there is.’”

“They’re two very different films with the same DNA,” adds Michael Fassbender, who, apart from a small Noomi Rapace cameo, is the only rebounding cast member from the first film. “[*Alien* fans] are definitely not going to feel robbed on this occasion,” says producer Mark Huffman. “They’re going to love it.”

Prometheus, if you remember, ended with Dr Elizabeth Shaw (Rapace) heading, with the treacherous, disembodied android David (Fassbender) in search of the homeworld of the Engineers, the humanoid aliens responsible for life on Earth.

Alien: Covenant picks up the story ten years later. The Covenant is a ship en route to an Earth-type planet to ready it for colonisation. But before the crew get there, they intercept a distress signal from another planet.

While *Prometheus* had its share of knockers, there was one thing everyone was agreed on, which is that Michael Fassbender basically stole the film as the Lawrence of Arabia-aping David.



This time round, Fassbender is back on double-duty – as David, and also as Walter, a next-generation android.

“He’s programmed without any human traits,” says Fassbender on the difference between Walter and David. “They’ve taken that out of the programming so that they don’t develop quirks. There’s no pride to Walter. He doesn’t have feelings of inferiority, or any of those human traits that might have been present in David. He’s more like Leonard

ABOVE

Meet the new Xenomorph – now run for your sodding life

BELOW

Ridley Scott with new cast member Jussie Smollett of *Empire* fame

Nimoy’s Spock. He just operates under logic and whatever’s necessary to keep the crew and the ship safe. He’s like a super-butler.”

Although Rapace’s Dr Shaw is apparently long-gone by the time of the *Covenant*’s arrival (one of the featurettes suggests she was killed by a Xenomorph, and her cameo is via a years-old hologram), the new film features another kick-ass female lead in lieu of the main franchise’s Ellen Ripley. Katherine Waterston plays

Daniels, the ship’s chief terraformist. “When they get to the planet, she’s in charge of making things grow there,” Waterston says.

Early scuttlebutt suggested that Daniels might – just might – be revealed to be the mother of Ellen Ripley. Whether she is or not, Waterston isn’t letting on.

“I know nothing,” the actress laughs in a Manuel-from-*Fawlty Towers* accent.

Whether she’s a Ripley or not, she’s certainly a very Ripley-esque character. Waterston describes Daniels as “a reluctant hero” who “starts the film as third in command” before events “promote her”.

The actress, now 37, wasn’t even born when the first *Alien* came out, but she calls herself “a big fan of Sigourney Weaver’s”.

“Being a girl growing up in the Eighties, those kind of roles were pretty exciting for young women to see,” she says. “Not necessary when it came out, but when I did see it.”

For Waterston, whose CV is full of smaller, more indie-flavoured projects like *Inherent Vice* and *Steve Jobs*, working on a movie of this budget-guzzling size is still a cherishable novelty (her only previous paddle in blockbuster waters was last year’s *Harry Potter* spin-off





Expect a gruesome new twist on that infamous John Hurt scene from the original movie

“He started showing me some diagrams. I was like, ‘This is about Alien, isn’t it?’”

Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them – she appears to have a thing for big franchise prequels).

“There are so many things that are the same as a teeny little independent film, but a lot of things that are different,” she says. “There’s a lot more food. One time, I did a movie where the crafts service table was just a bucket of Domino sugar packets and Styrofoam cups. That was it!”

“And there’s more people,” she says. “The thing that’s incredible is how these things are orchestrated. There’s just so many vast departments working on things all the time. You don’t even know what they’re doing, and then three weeks later you see this amazing new set. But the way Ridley works is quite intimate, and you still feel like you’re in a little group huddle just working on a problem. It doesn’t feel big.”

Waterston’s co-star, Danny McBride, is another cast member who’s fresh to

this world of mega-budget filmmaking. Mostly known as a comic actor, the 40-year-old McBride was a surprise bit of casting when his name was announced last year. A self-confessed “huge fan” of the *Alien* series, he went along to his first meeting with Ridley Scott initially unaware that he was being courted for an *Alien* film.

“I went in for the meeting,” he says, “and Ridley was just talking about things in general, and then he started showing me some diagrams. I was like, ‘This is about *Alien*, isn’t it? This has to do with *Alien*!’”

McBride plays Tennessee (“I think it might be a homage,” he says about the name, referring to Tom Skerritt’s Captain Dallas from *Alien*), the *Covenant*’s pilot. Unlike *Alien*, where the *Nostromo* had a crew of only seven, the *Covenant* has over 2,000 colonists on board, though most of those are in cryogenic sleep, ready to be woken when the ship reaches its leafy destination.



Meet the new Ripley

Katherine Waterston tells us what to expect from Daniels

How does it feel to stand opposite a Xenomorph in real life?

That was so incredible. There are these two guys who are about seven feet tall, and they both seem to weigh about 120 pounds. So when they get into the costume, it gives them a little extra height, and their fingers are all like this. It doesn’t look like there’s a person in the costume. It’s really insane. And that’s just there for Ridley to work with. He’s so smart about that stuff. He did it on the first film, too. He had real guys in suits, but he knew to not show them too much, because if he did, they’d start to look like people.

You do a lot of your own stunts on this film. Did you have to get special training or anything to do this?

I got myself into the kind of shape where I thought I wouldn’t get hurt if they asked me to do crazy things. I wasn’t concerned too much with physical aesthetic, but I just wanted to be sure that... yeah, that I could feel safe, with my body hanging out.

“Ridley takes care of his business... He builds the playground you get to play in”

Why did you want to do your own stunts?

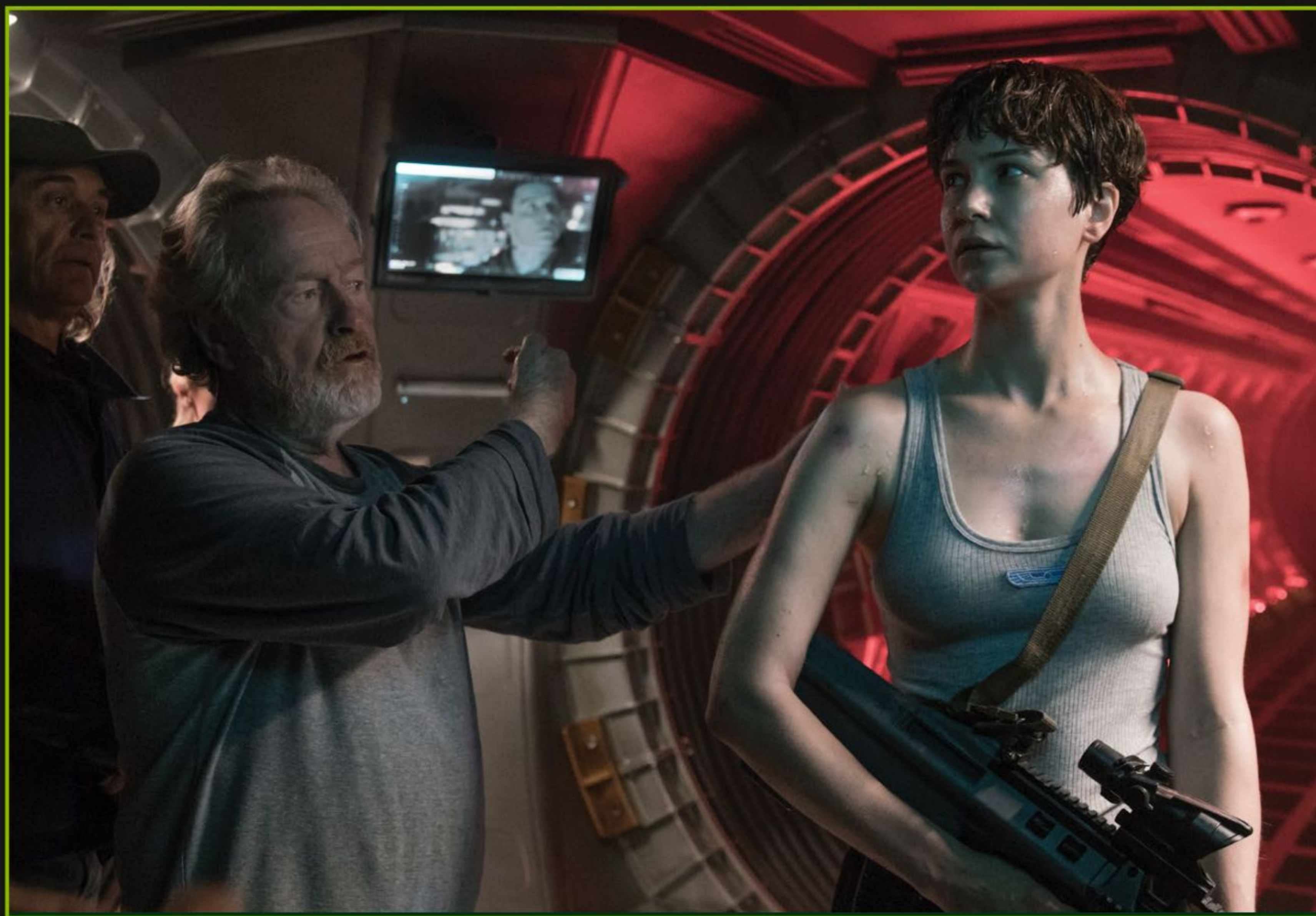
Well, I guess I don’t really think about it that way. I thought about it like, I wanted to serve Ridley’s vision and desire to the greatest extent possible. So, you know, I just wanted to be able to do what he asked of me, basically.

He’s quite protective, actually. I don’t get to do everything. Also, it’s fun, because it’s the part as written on the page. It includes the scenes between... you know, a two-hander with Michael, and it also includes swinging off the side of a building. It’s part of what I signed up for. I’d like to be able to do as much of it as I can.

What has it been to work with Ridley Scott?

Amazing. I love hanging around in his tent and just watching him. He’s so decisive and clear about what he wants. Weirdly, that’s more liberating than someone who doesn’t know exactly what they want.

He’s simultaneously very controlling and specific about what he wants, and totally loose and free and open to what you want to try. He takes care of his business, and then he’s like, “Now you play in there.” He builds the playground you get to play in. It’s fun.



Most of the crew have their partners by their side (Tennessee's wife, played by Amy Seimetz, is his co-pilot), and so the dynamics, and the stakes, are significantly different to the first *Alien*.

With his background in comedy, McBride first thought he was being brought on as comic relief, but he maintains, "There isn't a whole load of comedy in this. From the time you meet these people, it quickly becomes about survival," he says.

ABOVE

We have a feeling no one will be "coochie coo"-ing this monstrosity

ABOVE RIGHT

Katherine Waterston's Daniels goes full Ellen Ripley

As is understandable for a long-time *Alien* fanboy, the first thing McBride did when he arrived on the Australian set was ask to tour the creature shops, where the designers were building the movie's monsters.

"It was awesome," he says excitedly. "That just seemed like that would be the coolest job in the whole movie, the people painting and designing that. You see all your cast members with their faces ripped open!"

Unlike *Prometheus*, which give us only a few prick-teasing seconds of a first draft alien, the new film goes full-tilt Xenomorph. The trailer has already given us more than a glimpse of a drooling, human-hungry Alien, but we're promised a new take on the species as well, which everyone here is dubbing the 'Neomorph'.

If the classic alien is defined by its hard, shiny black shell, then the Neomorph is all fleshy white skin.

Just add Walter Seeing double with Michael Fassbender



You're playing two androids in this film. Do they get on? In the scenes they share together, do they have a good relationship?

Yeah. You know, there's an understanding there, I guess.

If you're doing scenes with yourself, how different or odd is that?

It's fun. It can be a slower process, because I'm such a slow actor. No, because basically, we've got a crane, so everything is timed. Let's say I'm playing David and I'm sitting here and I move over there, and Walter's coming in the door here; those movements have to be timed according to what my double has done. That just takes a little bit more time to sync everything up.

Does this film develop a whole origin story of *Prometheus* – the origin of the aliens, the origin of the human race

that was in *Prometheus*?

Certainly, it follows on from that concept – that universe of *Prometheus* that was explored. The engineers are present in this.

Has David's time on this paradise planet changed him at all?

Well, I mean, essentially, he's ten years without maintenance. So whatever that does to your computers here, it might have a similar effect on him.

Does Ridley give freedom to actors to create the characters? Or is he strict with the characters?

No. This is the third time working with Ridley. On each three of the experiences, it's always been the same, in terms of: he's done his homework, for sure; he's very well-prepared but he's somebody that is willing to throw out that plan if it's not working on the day, or if anybody else has got a suggestion that he thinks is better. So

from day one of *Prometheus*, which was the first time that I worked with him, it was very much playtime. He's got very provocative notes as a director that are suggestions of shadings. He can really draw them from anywhere.

The first note he gave me on *Prometheus* was: "Think of David as a butler. Maybe he's checking the dust on the table." That sparks up a whole idea of a character.

So he's quite minimal in what he says, but it's very effective. I find that's been the case with the best directors that I've worked with.

Elizabeth Shaw survived *Prometheus* with you. Is there a reason why she's not in the sequel?

Well, you'll have to see it. The story that transpires in this film... it'd be hard to allow Elizabeth Shaw to be present in that, because... I can't really describe it without giving away the movie!



“We’ve gone for an R. So, full-on scary. If you like blood, you’re not going to be left unsatisfied”

Based on a goblin shark (“a hideous thing,” according to Scott), the Neomorph appears to erupt from their victim’s back, if the trailer is anything to go by.

Although *Prometheus* was classified ‘15’ in the UK, ‘R’ in the US, for “strong violence, gore, threat and horror”, the fact is, it was fairly tame by *Alien* standards. *Prometheus* wanted our awe, not our terror, but *Alien: Covenant* appears to be returning to the scares.

“In terms of horror, we definitely move closer to *Alien*,” says Huffman.

“There’s quite a lot of action and lots of scares.”

And while it’s not yet known what rating the movie will get over here, Huffman claims they lensed it aiming for the highest American rating, meaning the movie will most likely be restricted to anyone under the age of 17. “We’ve gone for an R,” he explains. “So, full-on scary. If you like blood, you’re not going to be left unsatisfied.”

What happens after *Covenant* is anyone’s guess. Scott has continually flipped and flopped as to whether this


ABOVE TOP
Daniels and the crew of the *Covenant* are on a mission

ABOVE LEFT
Badly lit corridors? It can only be *Alien*...

ABOVE RIGHT
Bringing out the big guns

prequel series is a trilogy or a, ahem, quadrilogy. But for the moment, they’re taking each film as it comes. Although everyone here is confident of *Alien: Covenant*’s box-office muscle, they’re not taking anything for granted, and whether Scott gets his next film – or *films* – depends on how this one does. But rest assured, there are plans.

“How this one ends will definitely take you on to the next one,” the director, who turns 80 in November, says, with a gleam in his eye. “I’m not going to tell you what the ending is, but yeah, it’ll definitely take you on to the next one. It leaves lots of big questions...!”

Alien: Covenant will be released in cinemas on 12 May, distributed by 20th Century Fox. 

Marathon Man

#4 **ALIEN**

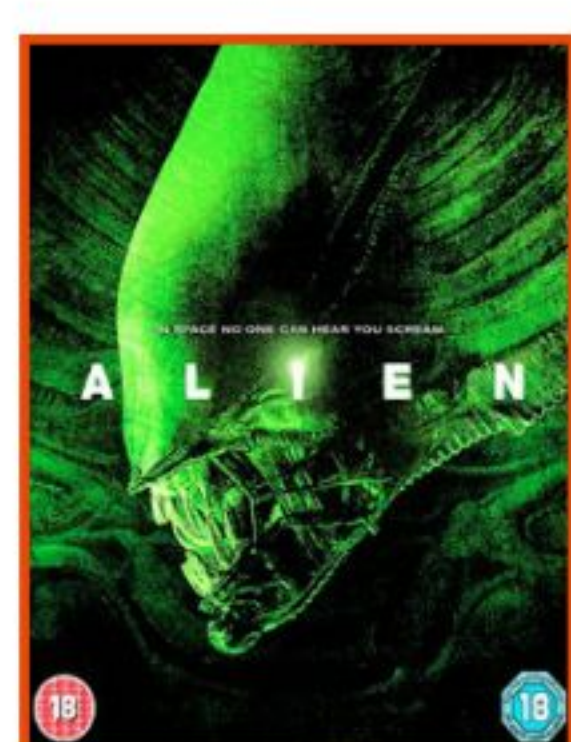
One horror fan, a whole heap of movies...
Ian Berriman faces off against the facehuggers



How many horror franchises are still knocking out blockbuster hits after nearly 40 years? It's difficult to think of another. Ridley Scott's brainchild has proven to be as protean as its titular nasty, capable of assuming all manner of new forms. It can be a war movie. It can address philosophical issues. It can be a numbskull monster mash.

With *Alien: Covenant* looming large on the horizon, there's no better time to revisit the first seven instalments of the saga. So join me as I strip down to my smalls, strap on a flamethrower, and shout "Come and get it, baby!" **WARNING:** I know 'Xenomorph' just means 'alien form', but it's a handy term I'll be using repeatedly very shortly. Suck it up, pedants!

ALIEN (1979)



Lord knows how many times I've watched *Alien* over the years, but it's always a delight. I love how authentic its world feels: the crew of the *Nostromo* curse and smoke fags and wear Hawaiian shirts, and their environment feels lived in. I love Ripley, who slowly reveals herself to be an indomitable heroine, more than a match for any man. I love the enigma of that derelict alien ship, lying legs akimbo on the planet LV-426.

And I love the creature they find there, and its bewildering life

cycle – so much so I can even let its preposterous growth rate slide without grousing. HR Giger's never-bettered design is phantasmagorically beautiful. Though I *know* it's just a man in a suit, there's something about its elegant lines and the way it can uncurl from a shadowy crevice that makes me forget.

I wish I could recreate the sensations an unsuspecting audience must have felt at each fresh shock: the first facehugger flying from an egg, the discovery that it has acidic blood, the chestbuster screeching as it punches out of John Hurt's abdomen. Sadly, I was forewarned

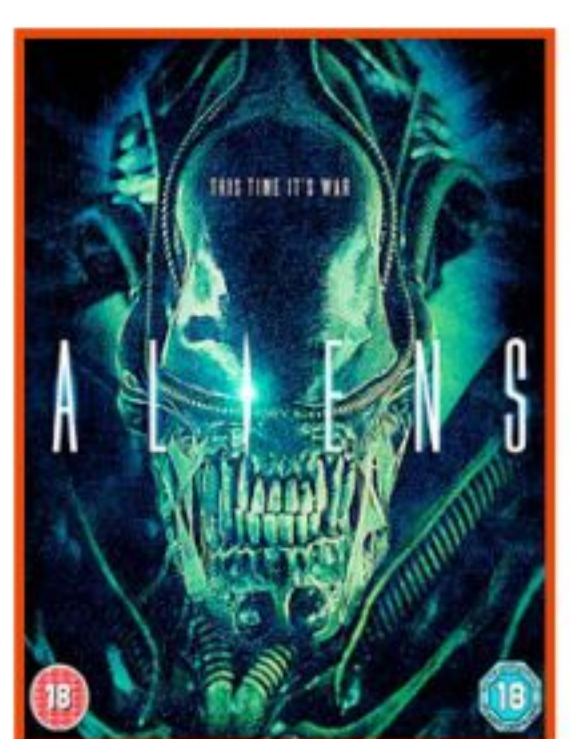


about them all. Can someone invent technology sophisticated enough to selectively wipe your memory? Sure, it'd have terrifying implications for personal liberty, but being able to watch *Alien* again through completely

innocent eyes would pretty much balance the scales.

FACT To make the sets look bigger, Ridley Scott filmed three kids in child-sized spacesuits approaching the derelict.

ALIENS (1986)



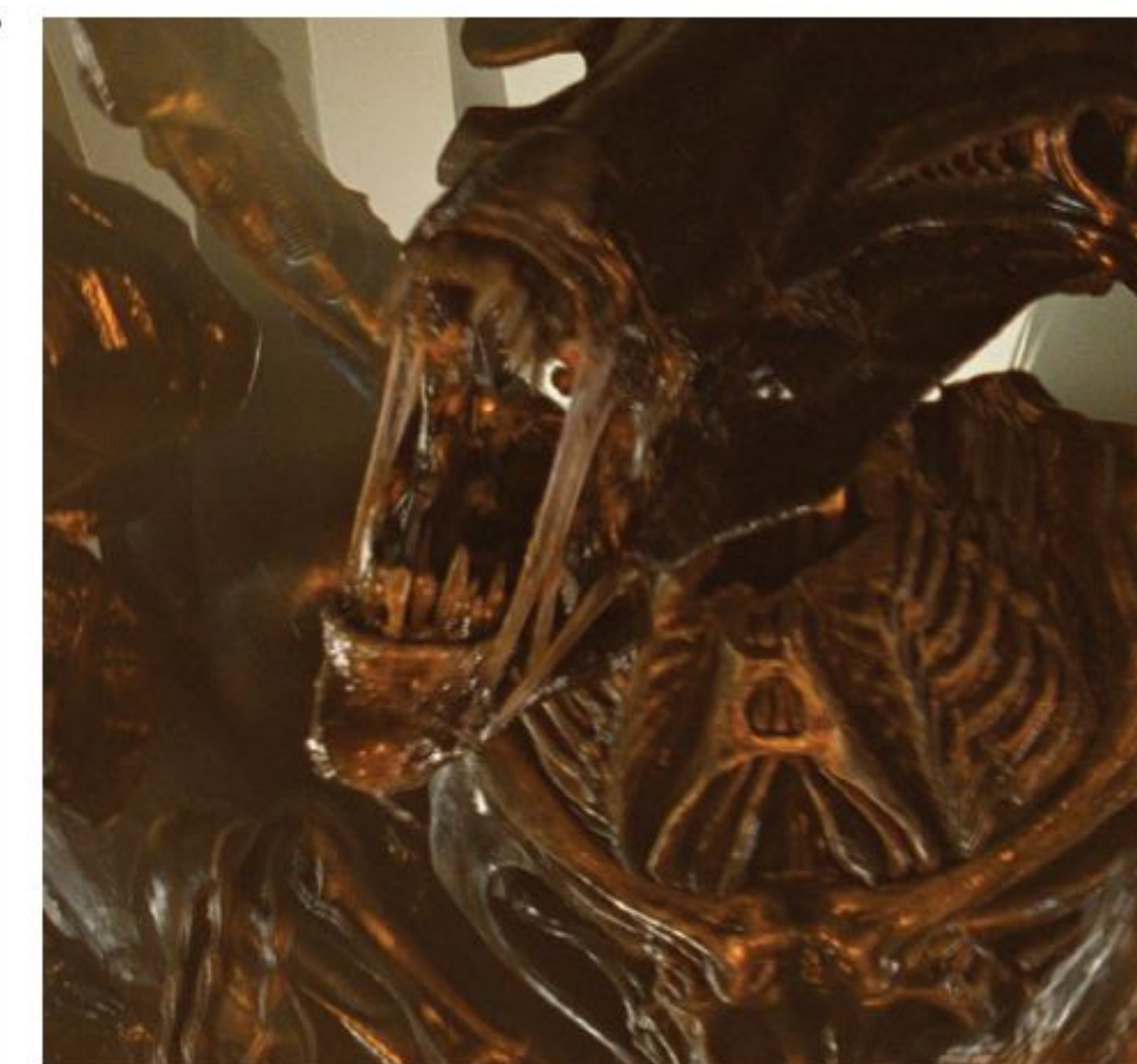
Not many directors can follow up a classic with a sequel every bit its equal, but James Cameron seems to have the knack – seriously, have you seen *Piranha II: The Spawning*? That shit is dope.

After 52 years in cryo-sleep, Ripley is defrosted to discover that a colony has been set up on LV-426. When contact is lost, she's coerced into accompanying a squad of marines to see what's up.

Why anyone would live on LV-426 escapes me – this howling wilderness must be the arsehole of the universe. And some of the

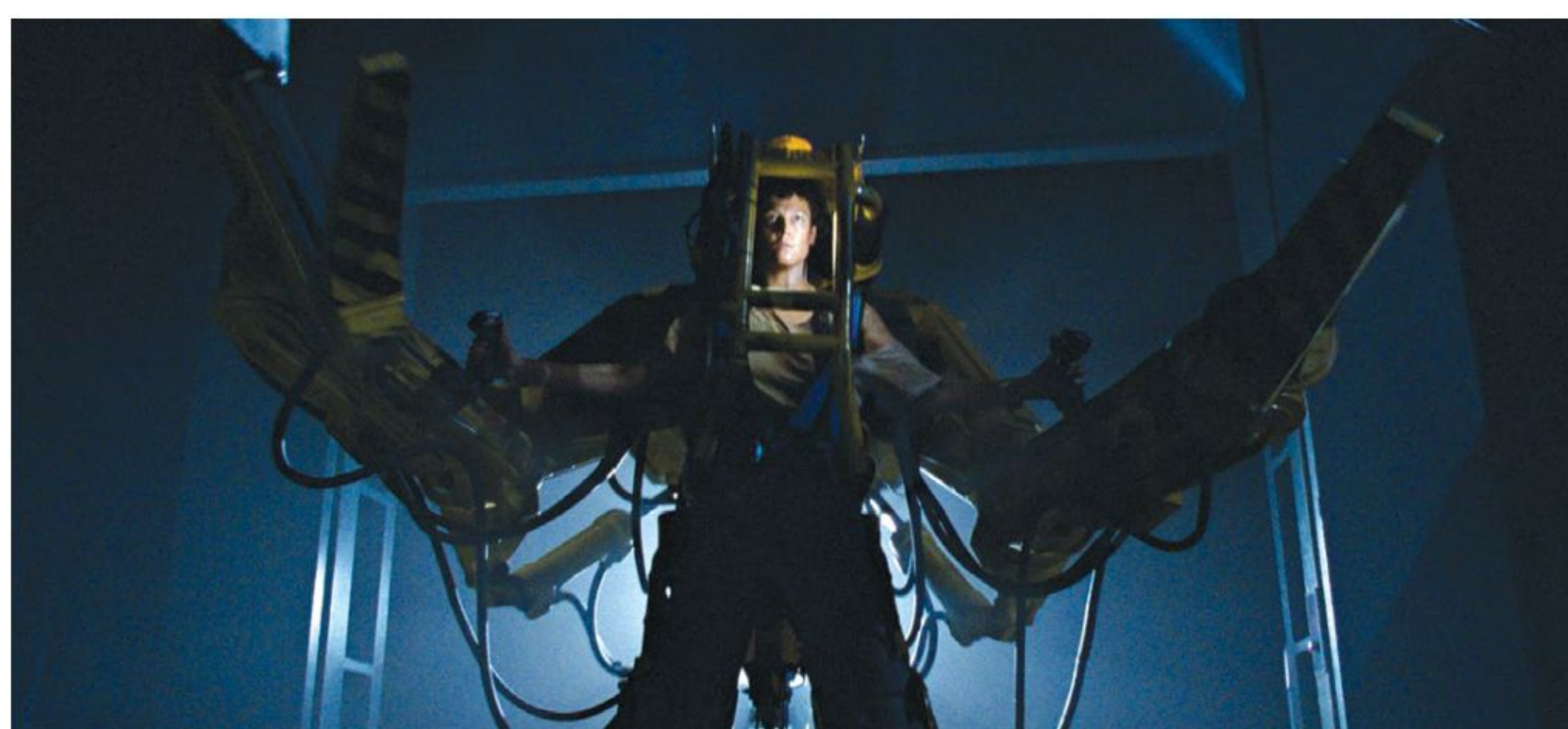
marines' weapons are laughable – how are you supposed to *run* carrying a five-feet-long gun? But I can't find fault with much else. There are iconic characters aplenty in the shape of marines Hicks, Hudson and Vasquez (the fact that the squad is mixed-gender is a neat touch), exhaustingly tense countdowns and thrilling action sequences. And we're finally given an answer to the question: "What the hell *laid* those eggs?", as Ripley takes on an Alien Queen in the mother of all scraps.

The way Ripley becomes a surrogate mother to nine-year-old survivor, Newt, troubles me a little, though. It's a touching relationship that ups the stakes for the character. Still, I can't help suspiciously picturing a studio



exec saying, "This take-charge chick – can't we give her some *normal maternal drives*? That's gonna play better in Tennessee."

FACT The marines' APC was based on a towing tractor bought from British Airways, used for pulling aircraft around at Heathrow.





ALIEN 3 (1990)



Set in a prison full of familiar British actors, this third instalment is the *Alien* film *Scum* director Alan Clarke might have

made. I half expect someone to take on a Xenomorph with a sock full of snooker balls.

Killing off Hicks and Newt in cryo-sleep gives it quite a hump to get over, initially. It gets a bit wearing watching the inmates bellowing “Piss off!” and “Wanker!”. And the love-interest angle doesn’t fly. Within ten minutes of meeting Charles Dance’s doctor, Ripley’s hitting on him. Maybe watching a guy crack open your surrogate child’s chest with a bone saw for autopsy *would* make you horny, but I doubt it.

I like the way *Alien 3* pares things down to basics, though: unarmed characters taking on a single creature using their wits. Director David Fincher lends the



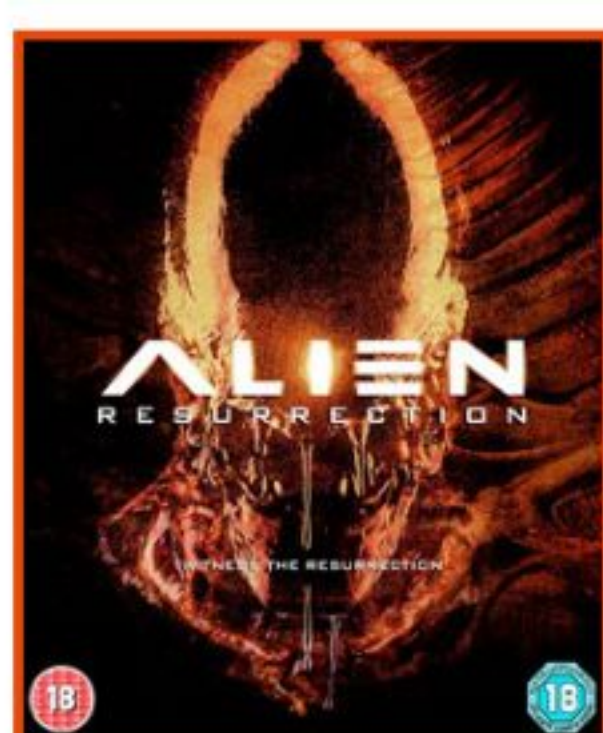
dank industrial setting a grotty noir grandeur. Ripley’s eventual death, diving into molten lead, is affecting. And I love Brian ‘voice of Tetley Tea Bags’ Glover’s warden. With his prissy manner and specs-on-a-chain, he encapsulates a certain sort of airs-and-graces Yorkshireman.

The film introduces some fascinating new lore too: Xenomorphs can emerge from animals other than humans – here a dog – and take on their characteristics. The setpiece where the crims lure the Dog Alien into a furnace via a deadly relay is exhilarating. Can’t help thinking

they missed a trick by not throwing a stick and shouting “fetch!”, though...

FACT *Alien 3* was almost a *Withnail And I* reunion - Richard E Grant nearly joined Paul McGann, screen-testing for medical officer Clemens.

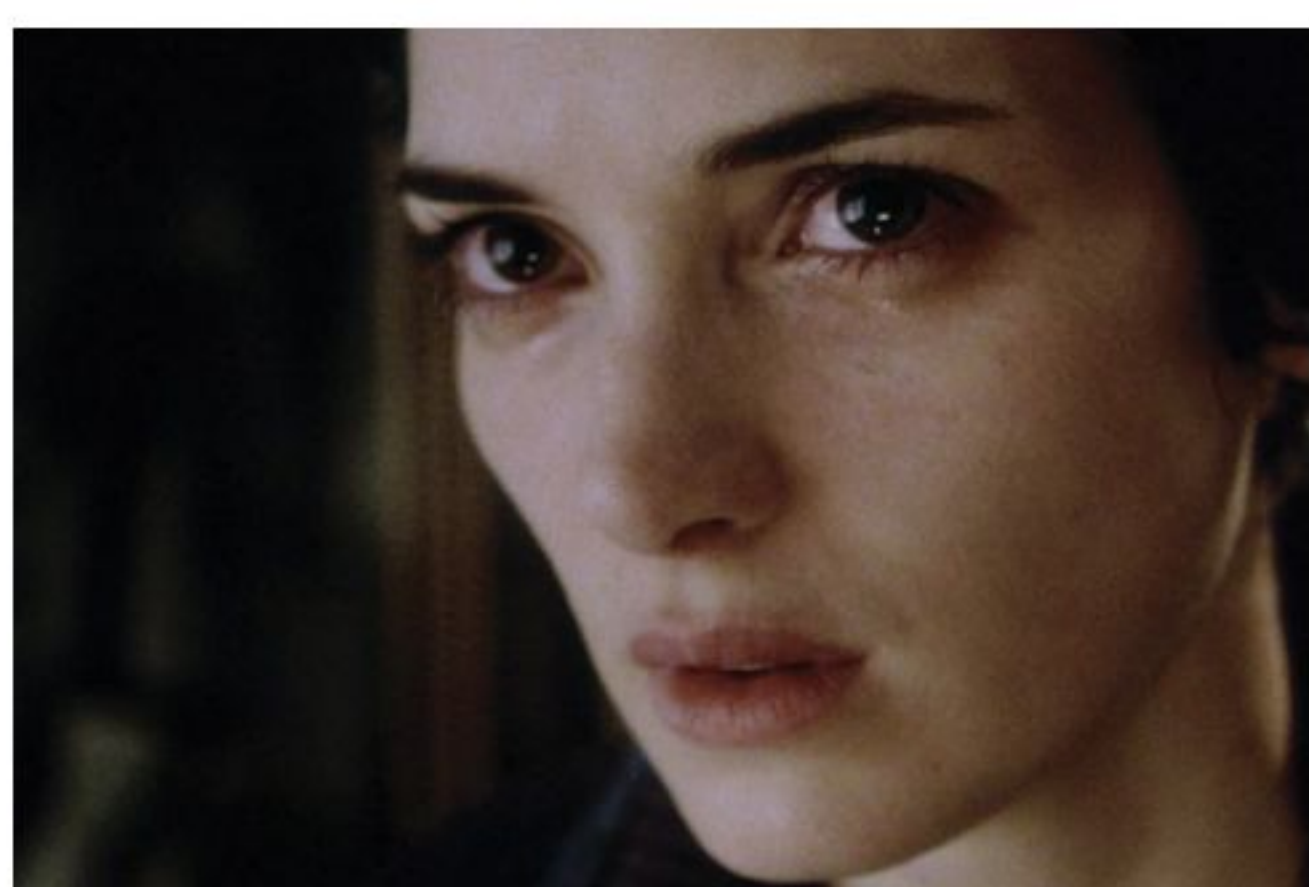
ALIEN: RESURRECTION (1997)



Ripley’s back! The Company wouldn’t let her stay dead, not when there are millions to be made exploiting

her for product. And Weyland-Yutani feel the same way... Ta-bum-tish!

I don’t swallow the basic idea – that cloning from Ripley’s blood creates a human/alien hybrid. Sigourney Weaver’s dispassionate clone is an interesting creation, all shit-eating grin and sinuous movements, but alongside strength and agility she has also acquired cheesy action-film



dialogue. When Weaver delivers the line, “So who do I have to fuck to get off this boat?” I wince in sympathy.

After cloned Xenomorphs escape containment on a science vessel (seriously – *no one* thought “acid-proof cells”?!), we follow a bunch of mercenaries as they trek to their ship. At walking pace...

Delicatessen director Jean-Pierre Jeunet is a left-field choice, and

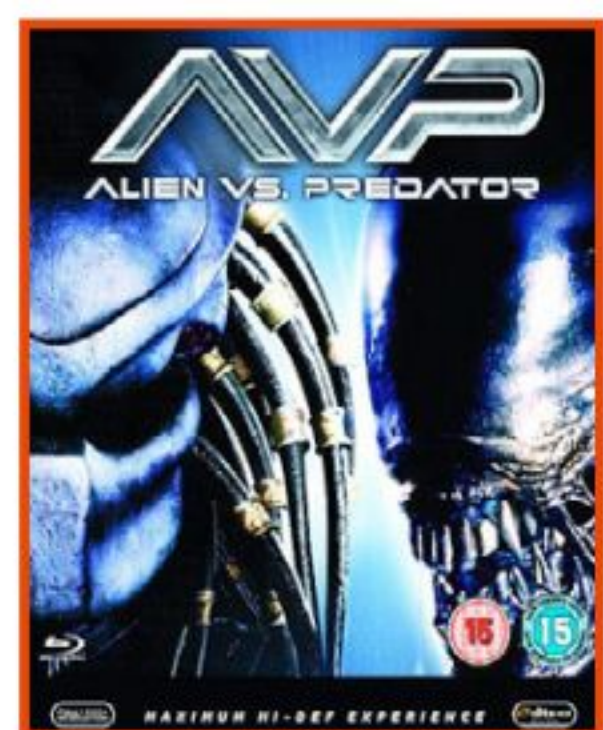
there are some pleasingly quirky touches – like doors that scan your breath. (Does this mean no one in command can eat polos?) Plus, Winona Ryder plays an android, and I could happily watch Nineties Winona Ryder just standing still for half an hour. But it all feels a bit too comic-booky.

I don’t have a problem with the ‘Newborn’, though – clone-Ripley’s freakish Xeno-grandkid,

all puppy-dog eyes and twitchy nose. It’s something different, and I feel sorry for it when it meets a grisly end, guts spraying into space like a tripe Roman Candle.

FACT *The Newborn* animatronic had prominent mixed-gender genitalia. They were digitally removed after it was decided that they were a bit much...

ALIEN VS PREDATOR (2004)



Monster team-ups have been a thing since *Frankenstein Meets The Wolf Man*, and to his credit, Paul W

Anderson devised a decent concept to bring these two titans together: a pyramid under the Antarctic ice, periodically visited by Predators to battle Xenomorphs as a rite of passage. The sets of this ancient structure are impressive – though it's strangely fragile, crumbling whenever someone's hurled against a wall. Much of the dialogue is awfully hokey, but the sight of Predators slicing and dicing Xenomorphs is undeniably cool.



It all gets a bit risible, mind, once Sanaa Lathan's guide, Alexa, bonds with the last surviving Predator, earning its respect as a warrior by offing a Xenomorph. As the Predator fashions her a shield and spear from the dead creature's head and tail, I can't help but guffaw. Has anyone ever cosplayed this look? A shot of the two running side by side reminds of me of that *Only Fools And Horses* scene where Del and Rodney dressed as Batman and Robin.

Ultimately, only Alexa survives. As more Predators arrive to recover their dead (wait, Predators have *stretcher parties*?!), she's presented with a spear as a token of respect. Then they leave her to freeze to death. I'd have politely asked for a parka or a lift to the nearest bus station instead...

FACT The icebreaker *Piper Maru* shares its name with the ship in an *X-Files* episode – which was itself named after Gillian Anderson's daughter.



ALIENS VS PREDATOR: REQUIEM (2007)



Black! Black! Like the endless blackness of space that leads to the chasm of clams! (Shakes head) Sorry to go all

Johnny Nice Painter there. Watching *Alien Vs Predator: Requiem* can do that to a man, because it's so pointlessly, relentlessly *dark*.

A chestbuster springs from AvP's dead Predator warrior, causing a ship full of pickled facehuggers to crash in small-town Colorado. Soon, a one-hunter clean-up team is wandering around pouring blue goo onto bodies to dissolve them, like one of those civic-minded neighbours who go litter-picking. Oi mate, could you pop round my road? There's an old mattress and a fridge that need sorting.

With chestbusters erupting from a young boy and a ward of pregnant women, it delights in

crossing boundaries. But the big problem is a more literal darkness, which leaves me with fiddling with the brightness settings as I squint at incomprehensible scraps in inky-black sewers. The big innovation is the Predator/Alien hybrid that first chestbuster grows into, but until the end it's impossible to get a clear sense of what it looks like.

In between the monster rumbles, we follow a cast of ordinary Joes. Apparently I'm meant to care if some pizza delivery dude with anger management issues gets his leg over. Nope. I can't say I'm that sad when an Evil Military Guy drops a nuke on the whole sorry mess. At least for a few seconds the town is well-lit...

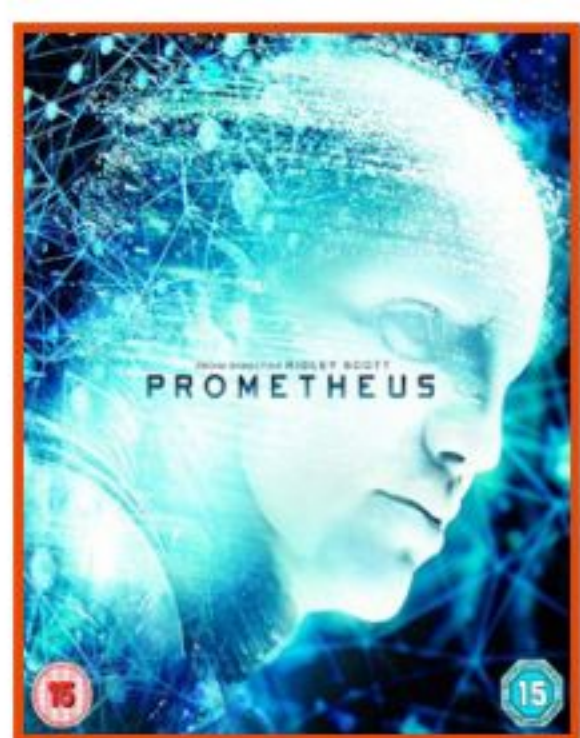
FACT The Colonel who orders the nuke strike was originally written as Garber, Adam Baldwin's character from *Predator 2*.





LEFT
My cat, Peggy,
re-enacted a
savage predator
attack rather
half-heartedly

PROMETHEUS (2012)



Bleary-eyed, I reach the final instalment – well, until *Alien: Covenant* hits cinemas. Time to visit LV-223, apparently home to a species that seeded life on Earth – the mysterious ‘Engineers’.

A lot of people hate this prequel. Not me. I don’t mind the absence of classic facehuggers and

Xenomorphs. I think Michael Fassbender’s android, David, is a fascinating character. I love the hard-hitting set pieces, like the painful-to-watch one where Noomi Rapace’s archaeologist uses a medi-pod to cut a squid-like creature from her belly. Ouch.

What I do mind is the *Prometheus* crew’s stupidity. Who the hell, on seeing an alien creature resembling a cobra, cheerfully coos at it? When Idris

Elba’s captain belatedly warns, “I wouldn’t touch that if I were you,” I yell, “Finally!”

Then there’s the lack of answers – and not just to big questions like, “Why did the Engineers create us?” Why does David infect one of the crew? If LV-223 *isn’t* the Engineer homeworld, why is its location in ancient cave drawings? I could go on... Some of the answers are supplied in deleted scenes, but I’m old-fashioned; I like questions to be answered *in the film*. I guess I shouldn’t expect anything less from a script reworked by *Lost*’s Damon Lindelof...

As I hit eject, I ponder whether *Covenant* will supply answers to those big questions. To be honest, I’m not that bothered. I’d rather just watch more people fighting scary monsters...

FACT The noises of Dr Shaw’s freaky squid-baby were based on recordings of Skipper, sound designer Ann Scibelli’s pet parrot.



Things I Learnt

Regular chestbursters burst out of supporting characters within minutes, but a Queen inside a lead character will take absolutely *ages*... (*Alien 3*)

Human/alien hybrids are really, really good at basketball – but androids are even better. (*Alien 3*/*Prometheus*)

“Mii sto cagando addosso” Is Italian for “I’m shitting myself”. (*Alien Vs Predator*)

Your average pizza delivery guy can handle an assault rifle like a pro within moments of picking one up. (*Aliens vs Predator: Requiem*)

When a massive spaceship is tipping over on top of you, it’s a good idea to run left or right, *not* straight ahead. (*Prometheus*)

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M

idnight, Texas isn't your typical town. The isolated community provides a safe haven for outsiders and otherworldly beings.

Residents include the centuries-old vampire Lemuel (Peter Mensah), witch and wiccan shop owner Fiji (Parisa Fitz-Henley), the tormented angel Joe (Jason Lewis) and the saintly Reverend Emilio Sheehan (Yul Vazquez), who transforms into a were-beast. On the human side, pawn shop owner Bobo (Dylan Bruce), assassin Olivia (Arielle Kebbel) and aspiring writer Creek (Sarah Ramos) all call Midnight home.

The land also rests on a veil between the living and the dead, and an unspeakable evil threatens to break

through those weakening barriers. Only newcomer Manfred (François Arnaud) – a charming psychic capable of communicating with the spirits – can fulfil a prophecy and lead the charge against the forces of hell. Set to premiere on 25 July in the US on NBC, and based on the Charlaine Harris novels of the same name, the TV series adaptation of *Midnight, Texas* satisfies those supernatural cravings while delivering action, mystery, romance and horror at the same time.

"Midnight, Texas is populated with vampires, angels, witches and psychics like we've never seen before," says executive producer David Janollari. "Charlaine subverts your genre expectations and reinvents mythology and lore in her trilogy. Just when you think you know what a vampire needs to survive, or what an angel is all about, think again. In addition, all of the characters in *Midnight*, both supernatural or human, are created with such warmth, complexity and, well, humanity. You fall in love with these neighbours, their quirks, their dark pasts and secrets and their passions."



MIDNIGHT, TEXAS

LIVING IN A GHOST TOWN

Bryan Cairns visits the set of **MIDNIGHT, TEXAS**, the new series from the mind of True Blood's Charlaine Harris, to talk vampires, angels and more...



THE BIGGEST BAD

It's a warm February morning when **Horrorville** visits *Midnight, Texas'* Albuquerque set. A large soundstage has been transformed into multiple shooting locations. Bobo's cluttered pawn shop stands in one corner. Olivia's living quarters – complete with hidden panels to conceal her weapons and disguises – takes over another space. Outside, the production team has erected *Midnight's* main street. A simply constructed church, graveyard and local bar sit at the end.

Today's sequence takes place off in the distance, too far away to hear any dialogue. Nonetheless, actions speak louder than words. This is the season finale, and it's all hands on deck. Several of the surviving characters have assembled to formulate a plan. Then, suddenly, they begin to stride towards town, determined to defeat the malevolent presence that has invaded *Midnight* – or die trying.

"There are several 'big bads' in our first season, both supernatural and human," Janollari explains. "The ultimate big bad is an entity so powerful and evil that he will turn the whole town against each other with a reign of death and destruction. Our *Midnighters* will really have to band together and go way out of their comfort zones to conquer this demon.

"The white supremacist biker gang, Sons of Lucifer, are also a significant threat to anyone, and especially to our *Midnighter*, Bobo" he adds. "Manfred is being hunted by Hightower, a

mysterious man who seems to stop at nothing to have Manfred wind up dead. There are other human evils that our gang encounters throughout the first season, too."

ACCORDING TO ALL SOURCES

Perhaps the biggest challenges of adapting one medium to another lies in determining what material to zero in on. In *Midnight, Texas'* case, books one and three heavily influenced the show. In order to keep the narrative on track, Janollari reports that the creative team developed a three-prong formula.

"We came up with a mantra of three engines that should run through each episode," reveals Janollari. "One, 'What is Manfred's story? What is Manfred's journey?' He's the centrepiece. He's the new guy in town. Every episode furthers our understanding or drive of him coming into his own. The second thing is, 'What is the threat of the week,' whether it's something coming from the outside, or something within our town. In the pilot, you have the opening of this thing under the floor, which tends to become one of our bigger season-arc threads, as well as who killed Aubrey (Shannon Lorange) and how do we solve this mystery? The third thing is, 'What's the *Midnighter* story of the week?' Each episode we try to focus on at least one *Midnighter*, and give some insight into their back story, their secrets or their loves."

Executive producer Monica Breen says the writers may put a fresh spin on various plot points and pay them off differently, but they remain "true to the



"The network keeps telling us, 'Make it scarier, go for it!'"

Peter Mensah is Lem Introducing a new breed of vampire



What makes Lem special compared to other vampires we've seen on screen?

Lem doesn't have to kill to survive. He doesn't have to kill to feed; he can actually feed off energy. He does what he calls 'leeching' which is something he can do to a greater or lesser extent. He can leech to the point of death, or can leech in such a refined way that it's a soothing experience. But he

also has the ability to feed like all the vampires we know. That lends itself to the more terrifying aspect of Lem. He doesn't hesitate to kill.

What is Lem's role in the town of Midnight?

You discover that Lem has been around [*Midnight*] for a couple of hundred years. Therefore, he is deeply embedded in that community. Because of the uniqueness of his longevity, strength and all the other vampire traits, he's also developed as the father figure. The town of *Midnight* is policed

by the regular police, but they live out of town. Everybody else drives around *Midnight*. Lem is often the one who patrols at night, keeping an eye on things. It's not just the regular people; it's the supernaturals that don't always behave themselves – and he's uniquely equipped to deal with them.

Lem and Olivia are more than friends. Why have these two monsters connected?

She comes into *Midnight* with baggage. She has a unique job. Olivia kills people, and she has bonded with the dead person in

town, the vampire. His ability to take away the pain of her past allows her to function as a more normal person. Over the course of time, they've started to function as a couple.

How much does the series delve into Lem's origins?

It's explored, yes, and referred to. There are certain circumstances that will make it a huge part of our show. Each one of these unique characters start to tell their own story, or the situations the *Midnighters* find themselves in and their interrelationships.



Midnight, Texas has plenty of supernatural surprises in store

tentpoles and stories Charlaine set up.” The mash-up of novels further allows them to cherry-pick the stronger elements and explore other avenues with the characters.

“One of the great things about those books is the characters are so rich that I actually felt there was so much more to tell with them,” Breen offers. “Charlaine’s back stories are so detailed and specific, and the characters she created have such interesting relationships. It added a little more plot to what was already there than trying to change the characters themselves.

“If these characters aren’t fun to watch, the concept will never sell a show for me,” says Breen. “It might sell a movie because it’s an hour-and-a-half, but a TV show needs characters I can sink my teeth into. I’m not great at the set piece without a character motivation. I remember taking film class in college and watching *The French Connection*. The teacher is like, ‘Why was that car chase good?’ Everyone was like, ‘Because it’s this and this.’ He’s like, ‘No! Because he’s obsessed! Because he’s driven!’

“That’s my mantra,” she continues. “Set pieces are only as good as the characters’ motivations to be in them. Then again, I love a good explosion. I love good fight sequences if you just earn it. So my characters have really good reasons to fight. Manfred, to me, is a man looking for a home. That’s a really interesting narrative for me. A man looking for a home with his dead grandma, who is only friend and confidant – there’s something so kind and sweet about that.”

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

You might assume that *Midnight, Texas* would contain the same graphic content as another supernatural melodrama, *True Blood*, and rightfully so. After all, Harris penned those fangbangers’ adventures as well. However, the producers insist that pushing the envelope in terms of sex and violence wasn’t a major concern. Apparently, there’s no shortage of fights or gore; it’s just not as extreme.

“Without spilling the beans, there are bloody deaths and frightening

François Arnaud is Manfred

Peering beneath the cranium of Midnight’s psychic scammer



How does Manfred view his psychic powers? Are they a blessing or a curse?

It’s definitely more of a curse than a blessing. Manfred has tried to make the most of it. He’s gifted. He doesn’t try to control his power. He’s used it to scam people and got away with things in the past.

He’s on the run because of it, and hiding in Midnight because of it. Those things will obviously come back to haunt him – quite literally. It’s a coming-of-age story. The journey to understanding his gift and powers is central to the plotline of the first season.

What made him decide to help the Midnight residents?

What is great about the character is that Manfred’s not particularly willing to help others. That’s why it’s so interesting to play a character who is flawed and selfish. He’s a reluctant hero who will eventually become the hero he was told he was meant to be. One of the reasons Manfred pitches in is he has nowhere else to go, and might as well make the most of it, and make these people his friends rather than his enemies. Ultimately, he does find it rewarding to help others, but it’s a learning curve.

How does Manfred process all the freaky stuff he’s exposed to in Midnight?

His experience with the supernatural is limited to spirits and ghosts. I don’t think Manfred was aware before going to Midnight of the existence of vampires and witches. It’s all pretty surprising.

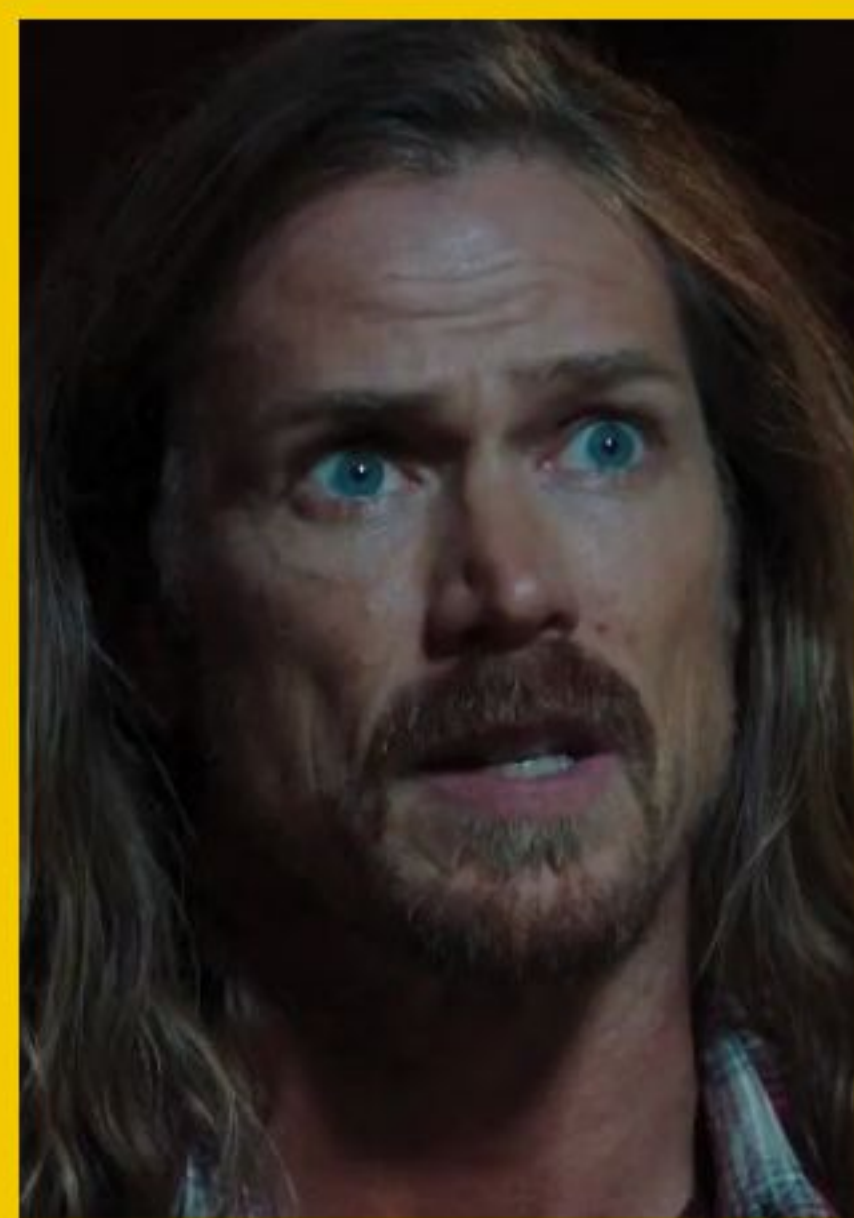
What is your own interest in this type of material?

I’m a big fan of independent horror films. I see pretty much everything. In recent years, I was a big fan of *The Babadook*. That’s a film I can draw a lot of parallels with Manfred’s story. It’s about controlling and managing your inner demons, without necessarily conquering them. It’s like taming the beast. That’s part of Manfred’s journey.



Jason Lewis is Joe

We're loving angels instead...



A lot of characters have room to breathe and grow in the TV series. What were your thoughts on Joe's marriage to his husband, Chuy?

I've done a lot of thinking and pondering about these two characters. You are dealing with a love affair that spans over a

thousand years, the way we are presenting it. I think basic human sexuality concerns go by the wayside. That tyranny of hate – us and them – has a different perspective for us.

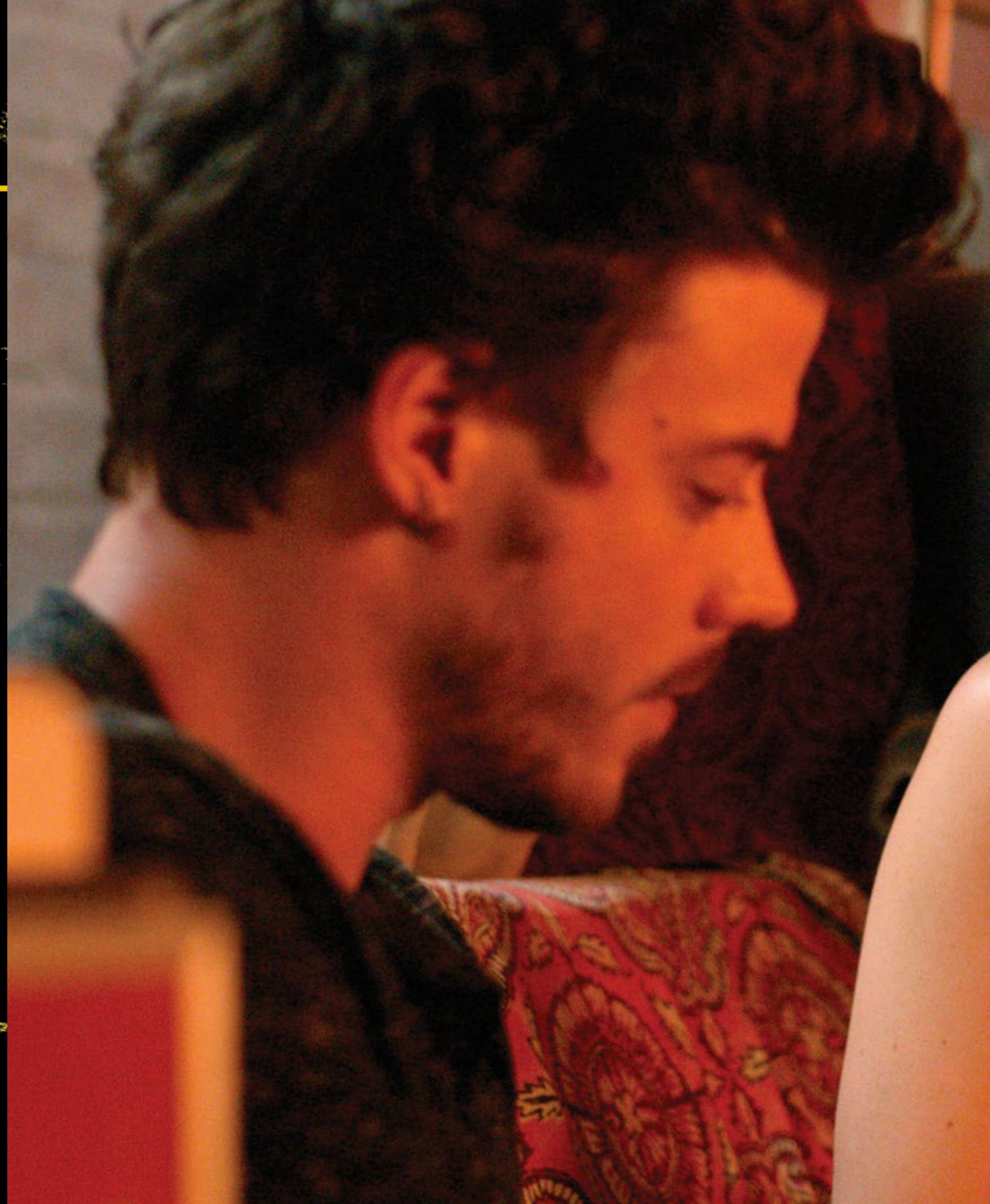
Joe has been described as the town's protector. Why does he have an affection for Midnight?

The town itself is a nexus point for reality. It is a spot between Earth and Hell. Joe has been at this battle before. He has been watching over this space on Earth for a long, long time. He has a lot of history there. He's watched this possible Armageddon try to come and manifest itself in this place for quite some time. The idea of him being there now is it's a place where supernaturals have congregated, unbeknown to themselves why they've been drawn to it.

“You are dealing with a love affair that spans over a thousand years, the way we present it”

How did you approach the physicality of playing Joe's angel wings?

I've done it in 27-degree [Fahrenheit, around -2 degrees Celsius] weather without a shirt on, so I've approached it with a shiver and a little spasming. The idea is it's a physical transformation and the wings literally exist in my body. The writers took the time to look at it, instead of just magically appearing, and that there would be some kind of physical. I look at it as a very painful birthing process. It's a contorting thing, where you need to have some muscles out of the way, and then spread and open. The wings are supposed to be coming out of my back in special pockets, so from musculature I have in my anatomy. It's painful. It's not a comfortable transformation.



“A huge part of the fun of Midnight, Texas is watching this army conquer evil and protect their way of life”

horror moments,” states Janollari. “The network actually keeps telling us, ‘No, make it scarier. Make it scarier. Go for it.’ I thought the standards and practices group would be like, ‘No, you can't do that.’ But they've wholly embraced it. It's not gratuitous. The pilot is very much indicative of the tone of the show.”

“Manfred sees the dead, and they exist in the moment of death,” elaborates Breen. “Dead people are generally not pretty. There is an adult genre here. Manfred is looking at death every day. He has to take that in. That could take him over. It's painful to watch his body be hijacked. We try not to be gratuitous, but have it tell us about a character.”

“What's emerged in the series that I'm really excited about is you fall in love with these characters falling in love,” Breen continues. “Yes, they have sex. Yes, they go through break-ups. Yes, they have highs and lows. It's not HBO, but it's emotional and honest. That's the commonality between *Midnight, Texas* and *True Blood*.”

Vampires, angels, witches and assassins don't typically play nice with each other or hang out in the same social circles. Too often there's an inherent hatred and distrust of one another. However, part of the attraction and fun behind *Midnight, Texas* is watching these strong personalities interact before going off to war again their common enemy.

MIDNIGHT, TEXAS



“Our team of Midnighters is better together than they are separately,” says Janollari. “Folks in Midnight help each other out, have each other’s backs. Where our group of heroes band together to protect Midnight from dark evil, or to protect each other, there is nothing that can stand in their way. A huge part of the fun of *Midnight, Texas* is watching this army conquer evil and protect their way of life.

“The supernatural and human community in Midnight are here to live their lives out of the spotlight, away from attention,” Janollari concludes. “When the spotlight starts to shine on Midnight, first because of the outside attention due to the murder of Aubrey, and later for other reasons, the Midnighters’ mission is to protect their way of life at all costs. And in the process, they form an unexpected family, an unorthodox bond of people who all have secrets and dark pasts to protect. Ultimately, it’s an epic story of love, redemption and friendship.”

Midnight, Texas will air on NBC in the US later in 2017, with a UK air date TBC.

TOP
Creek (Sarah Ramos) instantly hits it off with Manfred

TOP RIGHT
Arielle Kebbel and Peter Mensah as human assassin Olivia and vampire Lemuel

RIGHT
Manfred (François Arnaud) sees his psychic powers more as a blessing than a curse





DEATH SHALL COME



Universal is bringing back its most feared and beloved monsters, starting with *The Mummy*. **Bryan Cairns** spoke to actor Jake Johnson about kick-starting the studio's shared movie universe...

ON SWIFT WINGS...

Universal Studios intends to resurrect its long-dormant monster movies. It's certainly an ambitious goal that they've started to implement. In 2013, *Dracula Untold* revisited the origin of the most infamous bloodsucker of all (though it won't be 'canon'). Phase two comes this summer when director Alex Kurtzman reboots *The Mummy*. At the core of the film lies the eternal battle between good and evil – with a twist. The film's 'heroes' may not be quite as noble as Brendan Fraser's Rick O'Connell in the most recent *Mummy* trilogy.



» The movie features Tom Cruise, Annabelle Wallis, Sofia Boutella, Russell Crowe and Jake Johnson. *New Girl* star Johnson notes he was immediately roped in by the status quo shake-up and modern-day interpretation of *The Mummy*.

“What works about this movie is it’s a lot of genres at the same time,” Johnson says during our conversation. “There’s some comedy. There’s a ton of crazy action. It’s also a scary horror film. So it’s this weird mix of types of movies, all in a two-hour ride. It’s a go out, get dinner, see a movie and talk-about-it kind of film.

“And it just fell into my lap,” he adds. “My agent told me that Kurtzman wanted to meet with me. We had a FaceTime Skype, we got along really well, and he offered me the movie. I got involved even though there was no script to read. I didn’t even know what it was.”

Let’s fill in some blanks, then. Set for release on 9 June, *The Mummy* follows Nick Morton (Cruise) and his crew, including Johnson’s Sergeant Vail. Morton and Vail are US military, but they haven’t been deployed to Egypt to wage war. Instead, their group embarks on a caper to steal precious artefacts. As expected, that undertaking goes terribly wrong.

“At the end of the day, they’ve become disillusioned with the good fight, and are there as thieves,” Johnson explains. “Nick knows of a village. He finds a map where he believes there is going to be treasure. He has to get there, and when he arrives, there is already a gunfight. They don’t get involved in the shootout; they are trying to stay alive so they can steal. Long story short, there’s an explosion that leads to a hole that reveals the Mummy. They go deep into this hole, and accidentally unleash the Mummy. The spirit infects them both, and begins this crazy adventure they go on.”

This version of the mummy, Princess Ahmanet (Boutella), is no joke either. Forget the stereotypical bandaged, lurching, monosyllabic variety of mummy; Ahmanet was entombed for killing her father 2,000 years ago. Over the millennia, her hatred and cruelty have only intensified. Norton, Vail and the world soon experience the penalty for disturbing her slumber.

“What makes *The Mummy* scary is the way the studio did it,” notes Johnson. “There are sequences that are just meant to scare you. Then there’s the actress herself, Sofia Boutella. She has a very unique talent. Part of her uniqueness is her years of dance and the way she can move her body. The way she moves as the mummy – and visually how they built her up – she appears otherworldly. This wasn’t a movie where they did everything in post[-production]. Sofia wasn’t wearing a green-screen suit in this thing. They spent the hours in the make-up chair, so when Sofia was on set, there was a weird feeling in the air. Everything you see actually happened. It was extremely spooky.”

GOING ALL-OUT

As a mash-up of genres, *The Mummy* boasts plenty of action, which required the cast to attack many of their own stunts, or as many as they were allowed. Johnson reports that physicality was in the DNA of his role, but it required more commitment, stamina and skill than he originally anticipated.

“It got shockingly physical,” explains Johnson. “Tom goes for it. In the sequences where we are jumping over buildings as they explode, we are actually jumping over buildings as they explode. If you are too slow, or you trip, you are caught up in the explosion. That was the part of Tom Cruise that I had read about, but really wanted to experience.”



ABOVE
Tom Cruise and Annabelle Wallis star as Nick Morton and Jenny Halsey respectively

“Sofia Boutella has a very unique talent. The way she moves her body... she really appears otherworldly”

“I had to do a bunch of shooting and gun training,” he says. “We start out on horses, so I took horse lessons twice a week for a month. Because Tom wanted us to do all the stunts together, I had to train with him in his gym for four months. But, everything about Tom is about preparation and putting the work in. Filming is only part of it for Tom. He lives these movies. And he cares and loves them in a way that’s truly unique. I come from a different generation of actor. As we’re doing this interview, I’m wearing flip flops. There’s a more nonchalant way that I’ve had my career go. You make movies, you try to have fun, and tell stories people will like. Tom is from a generation where every single detail matters. He knows every single camera lens and why it should be used. You cannot have a false moment. He will not allow it. He will get on you if you are phoning it in at all, while you are working out or while you are shooting. I like the electric charge of working with him and the kick in the butt it gave me.

“Every single second, I was thinking, ‘What am I doing?’” Johnson adds. “But because you are so terrified, you just stay present. You are in it with Tom. So right before the takes, he’s in your ear talking about keeping you ready, keeping you present. We would slap each other’s arms and chest and say, ‘Stay in it,’ because what we were about to do was crazy.”

Principal photography commenced in Oxford before relocating to Surrey, London, and finally Namibia. Johnson

BELOW
This time, Sofia Boutella is playing the classic villain, reimagined as Princess Ahmanet





says the visual effects and production design “blew me away.” The movie’s trailer alone features crumbling buildings, plane crashes, a labyrinth of tunnels and an eerie morgue.

“There were no corners cut,” Johnson insists. “When we are going underground and we find the mummy, it wasn’t that the soundstage wasn’t impressive, but when you watch it on film, you’re like, ‘Whoa! You guys did such a good job in post.’ You get blown away by everything you see. Then you want to match that energy of the work they had done before we got there.

“When we were on the sand dunes, we were shooting in Africa,” adds Johnson. “If you are doing a scene where your characters get off the helicopter, common sense says you start in the air, land, and then get off in the same shot with the helicopter blades still going. Your senses were constantly on high alert because you never knew quite what was happening. There’s a sense of realism while you shoot so the audience can get lost in the story, and not just, ‘Oh, this is just a stupid movie set.’”

BUILDING BIGGER UNIVERSES

Writers Jon Spaihts and Christopher McQuarrie aimed to deliver a taut creature romp. Johnson also praises Kurtzman for his vision. *The Mummy* represents his highest-profile directing gig to date, while his producing credits include *Alias*, 2009’s *Star Trek*, *Fringe*, *Cowboys & Aliens* and *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*.

“What impressed me about Alex is he’s 100 per cent true to his word,” states Johnson. “What you see is what you get with him. He’s a straight shooter who actually loves working with actors and telling stories. He’s a true collaborator, so working with him is such a positive experience. I wouldn’t say that about most directors, or people in this business that I’ve worked with. I don’t want it to seem like I’m giving a stock answer, but he really is a good human being in a business that doesn’t have the most regard for being a good human being.”

“Our talks about the movie were more about the process and staying true to my character. He wanted to see a different side of me as an actor. We had a lot of conversations about who Vail was, his back story and what it’s like to shoot this movie and enjoy it while we’re shooting it, because it was a crazy experience.”

Marvel and DC successfully conceived cinematic universes for their superhero properties. Universal hopes to follow in those footsteps with their supernatural characters. Besides its undead baddies, *The Mummy* introduces Dr Henry Jekyll, portrayed by Russell Crowe and Johnny Depp has been tapped to play the Invisible Man in an upcoming movie. Those worlds could eventually collide, and if the opportunity arises, Johnson sounds gung-ho for additional gods and monsters.

“I would love to play Vail more,” Johnson concludes. “He’s a really great character. He has a fun outlook. Time will only tell what happens, but I’d definitely love to revisit Vail.”

The Mummy will be released in cinemas on 9 June, distributed by Universal.

ABOVE

The Mummy’s wrath is just the beginning for Universal’s shared monster universe

BELOW

Initial attempts to transport Ahmanet don’t exactly go according to plan...



“GOOD HEAVENS! WHAT A TERRIBLE CURSE!”

JAMES HOARE EXPLAINS HOW ARCHAEOLOGY, ALTERNATIVE FACTS AND
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE HELPED BRING THE MUMMY TO LIFE...



“Cagliostro was transformed into the long-dead Imhotep”

One of the interesting things about *The Mummy*, in contrast to Universal's other great franchises – the iconic Dracula, Frankenstein's monster and the

Wolfman – is it could just have easily not have been a tale of a reanimated Ancient Egyptian high priest.

Hunting the next film in his Gothic horror cycle after *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931), Universal producer Carl Laemmle Jr dispatched story editor Richard Schayer to find a suitable source for an Egyptian-themed fright fest. Schayer came back empty handed, but with novelist Nina Wilcox Putnam wrote a treatment based on the historical Alessandro Cagliostro, a 18th-century fortune teller and mystic who claimed to be an immortal. *Cagliostro* – for which a proof of concept poster exists with Boris Karloff in the title role – centred around a 3,000-year-old Egyptian magician who prolongs his eternal life via regular injections of nitrates. It was a far cry from the story that would eventually become *The Mummy*, but Laemmle loved the idea, and had *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* screenwriter John L Balderston knock it into shape, transforming Cagliostro into the long-dead Imhotep.

Yet 85 years on from *The Mummy*, it's impossible to believe this is anything other than timeless legend, so indelibly is it woven into the horror pantheon.

This bandage-enshrouded outing for *Frankenstein*'s towering Boris Karloff was followed by five sequels, most notably *The Mummy's Hand* (1940), which replaced Karloff's erudite, lovelorn Imhotep with Tom Tyler's shuffling, single-minded Kharis. (Tyler would be replaced in turn by monster-movie lifer Lon Chaney Jr).

With parody sounding a death rattle for the franchise in 1955's *Abbott And Costello Meet the Mummy*, Hammer picked up the baton, adapting Universal's *Hand* and its sequel, *The Mummy's Tomb* (1942), in glorious Technicolor as *The Mummy* (1959) with their dream team of Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, writer Jimmy Sangster and director Terence Fisher. A further

three sequels followed from the House that Dripped Blood (sans the star power of the first movie), firmly embalming the clichés of the sub-genre into horror history: tombs that should never be opened, love across the centuries, ancient gods and evil priests, and a cursed immortal sallying forth for vengeance.

PYRAMID SCHEMES

The road to *The Mummy* began a century earlier in the aftermath of Napoleon's 1798–1801 invasion of Egypt (one of the results of which was the extraordinary career of Jean-François Champollion, 'Father of Egyptology' and first European to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs), and just as Egypt began the 19th century under Napoleonic yoke, it would end it as the pith-helmeted possession of Great Britain.

For the Victorians, with their equally morbid and complex mourning rituals, the example of these ancient people was one to follow – perhaps they even saw something of themselves in this ancient empire, its ambition, wealth and grandeur, and saw its collapse as a potent reminder that even the 'greatness' of Britain would one day fall to dust. Scarabs came to adorn mourning jewellery, obelisks – that Ancient Egyptian symbol of eternal life – sprung up in cemeteries, canopic jars and sarcophagi pitched up in museums, and the great and the good eagerly attended 'unwrapping parties' to witness recently exhumed mummies disrobed in the name of science.

Then things got supernatural. In the 1840s, German Egyptologist Karl Richard Lepsius produced the first modern translation of scattered Ancient Egyptian literature relating to funeral customs, and bundled them together as the *Book Of The Dead*. This volume detailed Ancient Egyptian beliefs about death and the afterlife, the terrible trials awaiting the deceased in the worlds beyond ours, and the curses and charms by which they could stand a fighting chance of passing on unscathed. From here, influential mystics, driven by the wider interest in spiritualism and seances, incorporated this 'magic' into their own rituals and flimflam, informing a whole host of popular writers and personalities who clung credulously to the idea of life after death and powers beyond our comprehension.

One particularly worthy of being singled out for the role he plays in this



saga is Sherlock Holmes creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The man behind literature's most famous rationalist proved to be anything but. An outspoken believer in ghosts and the medium's ability to communicate with them, Conan Doyle famously fell out with his close friend Harry Houdini over the illusionist's debunking of spiritualism, and was infamously taken in by the downright daft Cottingley Fairies hoax, including the photos in his book *The Coming Of Fairies* (1922).

FROM BAD TO CURSE

With Ancient Egypt now inseparable from the macabre and the mystical, tall tales would inevitably circulate. One account published in the *Hampshire Telegraph* (25 July 1896) explains how a mummy was purchased by adventurer Herbert Ingram from the British Consul in Luxor, and promptly sent home:

"The mummy was that of a priest of Thetis, and it bore a mysterious inscription [...] which was long and blood-curdling. It set forth that whosoever disturbed the body of this priest should himself be deprived of decent burial; he would meet with a violent death, and his mangled remains would be 'carried down by a rush of waters to the sea'."

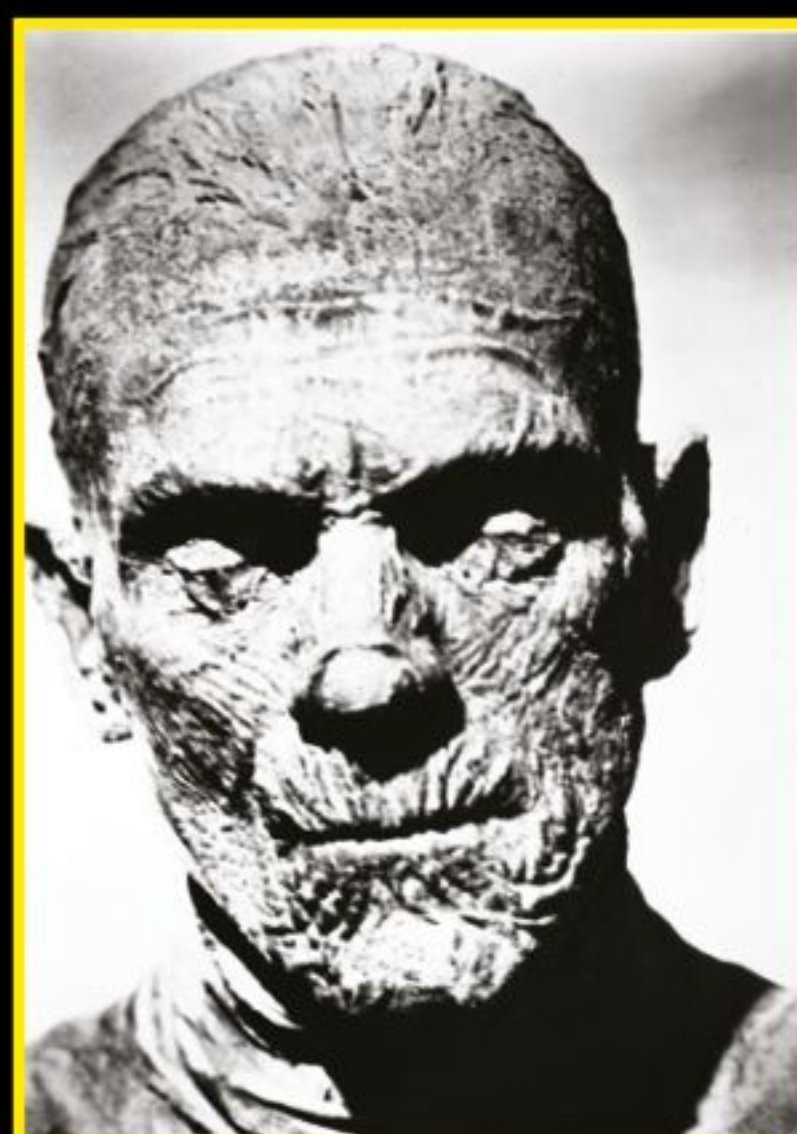
"Haggard wove reincarnation into the heart of mummy lore"

ABOVE

The name of Imhotep's reincarnated love was actually the real wife of Tutankhamun

BELOW

Boris Karloff's make-up was clearly inspired by Rameses III



While hunting in Somaliland (now Somalia), Ingram was gored and trampled by an elephant who remained at the scene. By the time his companions were able to reach his remains days later, all but a handful of bones had been washed away by the rains.

This captivated not just the press, but the gossips in Britain's far-flung colonial smoking rooms, and was gleefully recounted by Rudyard Kipling in a letter to H Rider Haggard, author of colonial adventure fiction and voracious amateur Egyptologist. Mummies feature heavily in Haggard's work – notably in *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She: A History of Adventure* (1886) – and the author was reported to own one, purchased for him by his brother in the 1860s.

She, adapted most famously by Hammer in 1965 with Ursula Andress in the title role, is a key text in the birth of the mummy as a storytelling sub-genre, although this is almost a secondary theme to all the uncomfortable racism, sexism and imperialism that carries the story along like a particularly offensive tide. Also, the mummies are props rather than characters, but the tropes are all there.

In the novel, Haggard's colonial heroes, a professor (Horace Holly) and his ward (Leo Vincey, discover an isolated African cannibal kingdom ruled over by a white (!) queen – the 'She who must be obeyed' of the title, the sorcerous Ayesha – in order to discover the truth behind Vincey's heritage, that



ABOVE
Karl Freund directed
the first *Mummy*
film in 1932

he's the descendent of a couple of runaway Egyptian lovebirds, Kallikrates and Amenartas.

Ayesha, it transpires, is a femme fatale who murdered Kallikrates for refusing her, leading Amenartas to charge all their descendants to hunt her down and take their revenge. Ayesha, meanwhile, has been waiting 2,000 years for the reincarnation of her love to arrive, doomed to repeat the old seduce 'n' slay that got her into this mess. Convinced Vincey is indeed her beloved (she shows him Killikrates' perfectly embalmed mummy, for good measure), she offers him immortality by stepping into a magical Pillar of Fire. He's not sure about this, so Ayesha attempts to prove it harmless, but the double-dose offs her. As she withers in the sacred flames, she promises him, "Forget me not. I shall come again!"

It's important to note that reincarnation has nothing to do with Ancient Egyptian mythology. Their preoccupation was the journey through the next life, not the return to this one, but reincarnation was very much on trend, and being a subject to close to Haggard's heart, he wove it into the very core of mummy lore.

GHOUL'S OUT

No longer constrained by time or death, writers brought long-dead Pharaohs, princesses and high priests into the present, and introduced the well-bedded, opium-fogged trope of Orientalism and that archetypal Victorian preoccupation with death to newly emerging anxieties about empire and ethnicity.

Perhaps the best-known exhibit is Bram Stoker's *The Jewel Of The Seven Stars* (1903) – second in his canon to the infinitely more celebrated *Dracula* (1897), and adapted by Hammer as *Blood From The Mummy's Tomb* (1971) – but he wasn't the first to crack the seal.

Jane Webb's *The Mummy! Or A Tale Of The Twenty-Second Century* (1827) is widely credited as the first mummy story (if you want to make a sub-genre of it). Inspired by mummy unwrappings and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), it is a breed apart – an idiosyncratic piece of science fiction horror that seems to have inspired few imitators beyond Edgar Allan Poe, who broke from his frantic prose for a short comic offering, *Some Words With A Mummy* (1850). Despite their vintage, neither can be recognised as the direct progenitor of the trope.

TOP 5 MUMMY MOVIES



1. THE MUMMY'S HAND (1940)

Director: Christy Cabanne
A complete shift from the slow-burning doomed love of the first Universal outing, *The Mummy's Hand* makes its undying antagonist a creature of pure horror, and for that we bump it to the head of the pack. Despite a cost-cutting recycling of footage, it's a real gem.



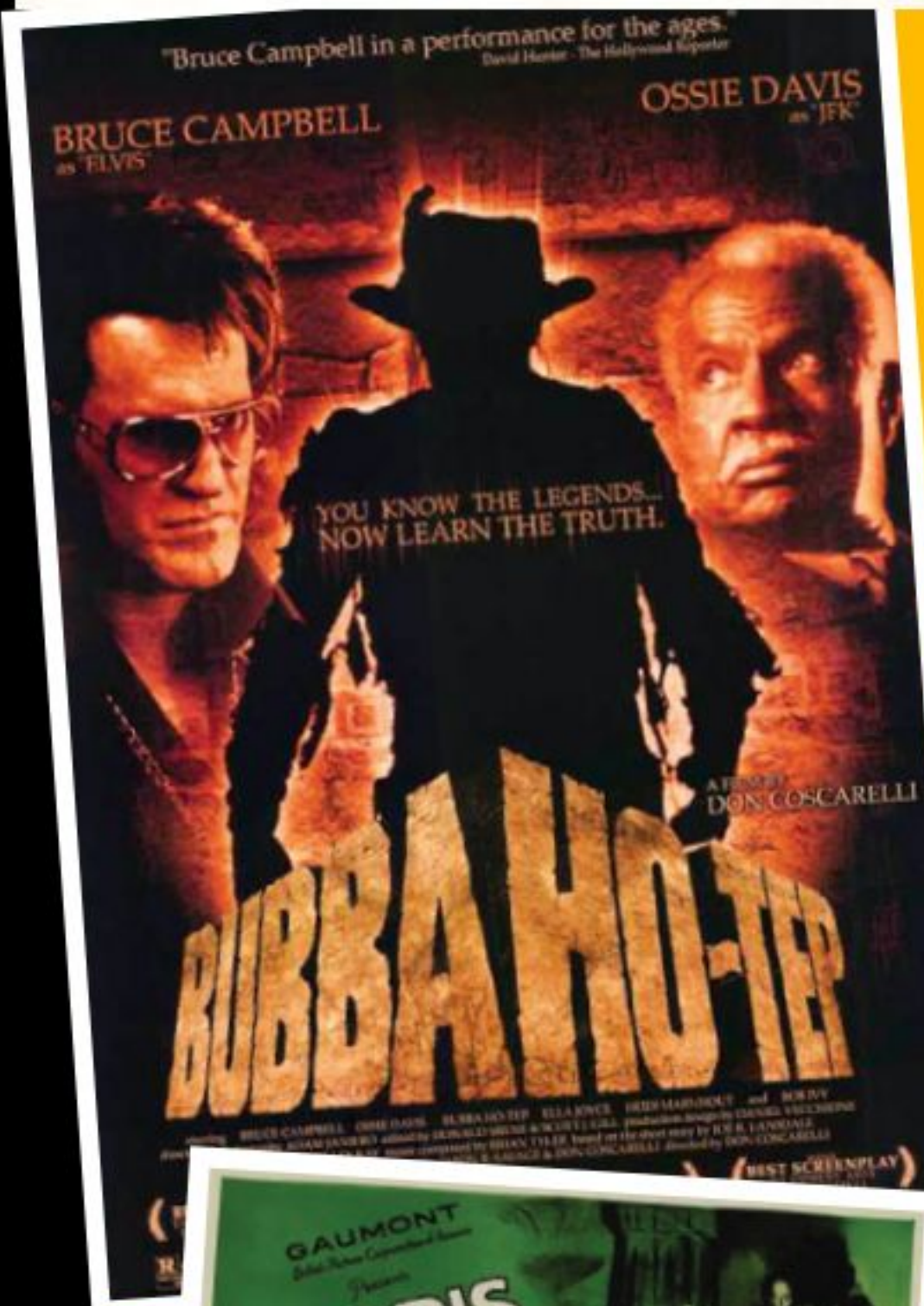
2. THE MUMMY (1932)

Director: Karl Freund
A work of dark, dreamy, expressionistic magic, debut director Freund serves up an Egypt of long shadows, while Karloff is impeccable in his dual role of the lonely and unsettling Ardeth Bey/Imhotep.



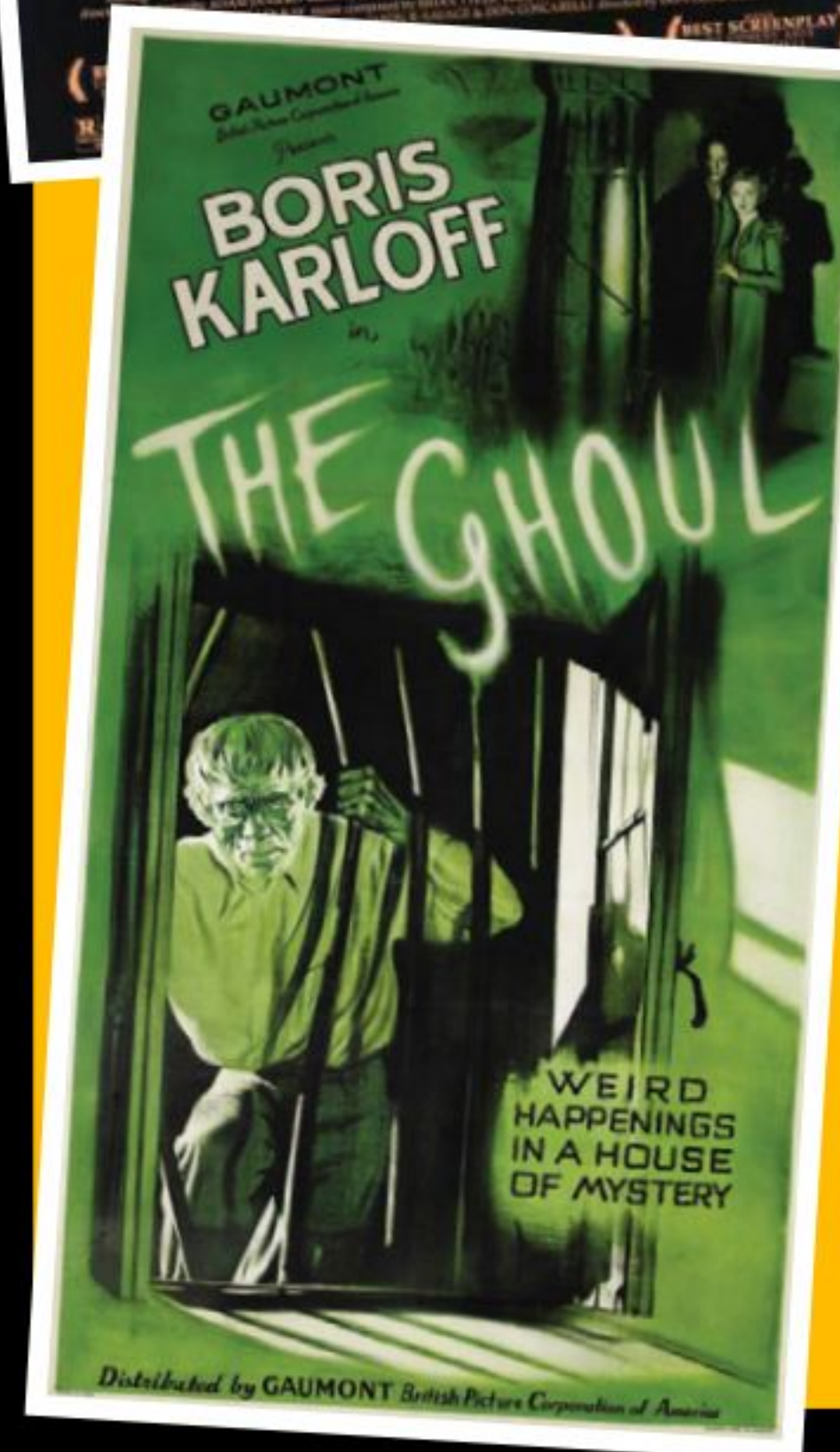
3. THE MUMMY (1959)

Director: Terence Fisher
Hammer joined the fray by doing what they do best: taking what had come before and making it bloodier and sexier. A real spectacle, this is arguably Hammer's 'perfect' Gothic horror, and certainly the best mummy movie of their series.



4. BUBBA HO-TEP (2002)

Director: Don Coscarelli
Purists may scorn the inclusion of the Bruce Campbell-fronted horror/comedy, but aside from endless reboots from Universal, it's the highest-profile new mummy flick in years. Now, where's that sequel at?



5. THE GHOUL (1932)

Director: T Hayes Hunter
A bit of a cheat in that (spoilers!) Boris Karloff's Professor Morlant is only posing as an immortal mystic, but this obscure British creeper took the much-missed 'old dark house' plot device and dressed it up with tombs and curses.



Instead, coming hot on the heels of Haggard, Gothic horror and mystery would arrive with a furious barrage of output in the 1890s. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's short stories *Lot No 249* (1892) – adapted for 1990 anthology *Tales From The Darkside: The Movie*, an all-star offering adorned with Steve Buscemi, Julianne Moore and Christian Slater – and *The Ring Of Thoth* (1890), Guy Boothby's *Professor Of Egyptology* (1894) and *Pharos, The Egyptian* (1898), Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), which outsold *Dracula* on its release, and much of Sax Rohmer's collected *Tales Of Secret Egypt* (1918) all dealt with immortal beings (sometimes mummies, sometimes more fanciful still) and their deadly interactions with the living.

Their motivations were most often revenge for ancient wrongs or disturbed burial places, as Boothby's titular fiend Pharos explained: "Ah, my 19th century friend, your father stole me from the land of my birth, and from the resting place the gods decreed for me; but beware, for retribution is pursuing you, and is even now close upon your heels."

BAE OF THE DEAD

It wasn't just anger that brought forth the restless dead; sometimes it was love. In Marie Corelli's bestselling (and critically derided) *The Soul Of Lilith* (1892) a master of the Ancient Egyptian mystical arts, El Rami, resurrects an orphan girl – the titular Lilith – with an elixir. Without her soul she is nothing but a breathing cadaver, and the increasingly besotted El Rami hides her away in his London mansion, seeking to restore her soul.

While Lilith is an Pyramid-flavoured Mills & Boon *Frankenstein*, *Ziska: The Problem Of A Wicked Soul* (1897) deals with strikingly similar themes to many of the movies that would follow in Imhotep's bandaged wake. In the novel, two gentlemen travelling Egypt find themselves competing for the affections of a local princess, the mysterious Ziska. One of them, in transpires, is the reincarnation of an Ancient Egyptian lord, and Ziska is the "flesh-clad ghost" of his favourite concubine, slaughtered by her master for getting in his way. There are, it's fair to say, unresolved issues.

Reincarnated beaus are the central conceits in Julian Hawthorne's short *The Unseen Man's Story* (1893), HD Everett's



Iras, A Mystery (1896), Stoker's aforementioned *Seven Stars* (1912), and Haggard's *Smith And The Pharaohs* (1912). Interestingly though, the trope is neatly subverted by *The Mystery Of The Mummy* (1910), the first published work from Fu Manchu creator Sax Rohmer.

Although the 'love across time' theme now plays a distant second fiddle to the cry of "Who dares disturb my eternal sleep?" both were bound together in the psyche of late-19th- and early-20th-century novelists.

The implications are complex, for adventure writers in the age of colonialism, where explorers penetrated dark interiors, laid bare their treasures and boasted of their conquests in smoky drawing rooms, the seemingly seductive long-dead Egyptian princess is a warning of the deadly consequences lurking behind both those alluring kohl-rimmed eyes and their imperial ambitions. That it comes dressed in all the exoticism and Orientalism of the 'mysterious east' undermines its anti-colonial message somewhat, but it's here that the shared DNA between the uneasy Gothic of Stoker and the canvas-coloured adventure stories of Haggard are the most obvious.

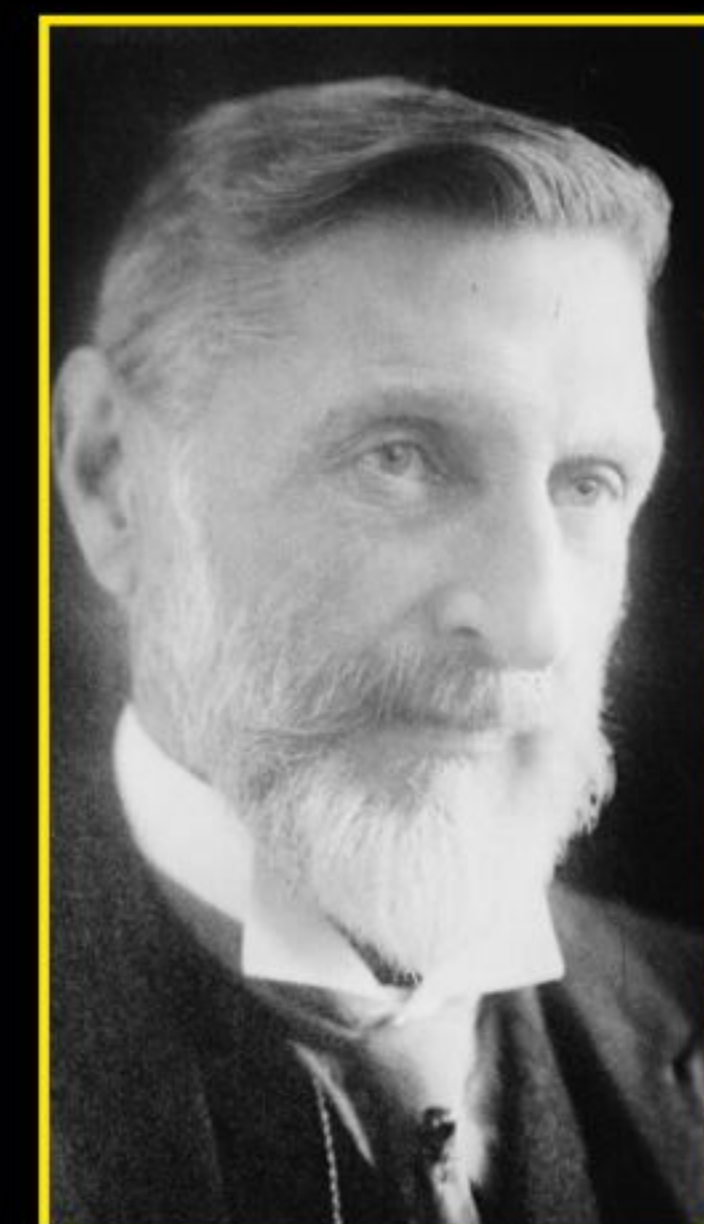
Despite all of these ideas percolating over the closing decades of the 19th

ABOVE

Love across the centuries would come to be a theme in mummy films

BELOW

Victorian adventure writer H Rider Haggard was an early pioneer of what would soon become clichés



century, the spark of life for *The Mummy* came only a decade before the cameras rolled on Karloff's imposing frame: Tutankhamun.

TUT'S ENTERTAINMENT

One of the last great discoveries Egyptology – and the first in a new age of mass media – the discovery of the boy-king's tomb was a sensation. The burial chamber was opened by archaeologist Howard Carter on 16 February 1923, and by April, Carter's outlandish financier George Herbert, 5th Earl of Carnarvon (often referred to as 'Lord Carnarvon') was dead. The cause was gruesome: Carnarvon sliced open an infected mosquito bite while shaving, leading to blood poisoning and pneumonia.

It's tempting to trace what we now call 'the Curse of the Pharaohs' back to *Daily Mail* correspondent Arthur Weigall, who lashed out at Carnarvon giving exclusive access to their rival, *The Times*. Weigall – along with every other hack denied a piece of the action – began to fill their stories with anything that came to hand, such as the death of Carnarvon's canary, which was grabbed by a cobra on the day the tomb was opened. It was an ill omen, as Tutankhamun's iconic gold-and-blue headdress is crowned by a spitting cobra, the symbol of the goddess Wadjet, whose role was to protect Egypt's god-kings.

A passionate (if controversial) Egyptologist who did much to popularise the subject back in Britain, Weigall was no friend to superstition,

“Many were all too eager to see the hand of the otherworldly”

but for lack of anything else to report he tried to have his cake and eat it. In *Tutankhamun And Other Essays* (1923) he recalled being awed by the solemnity of the tomb being opened, and so appalled by Carnarvon's wisecracking that he issued what he described as a "prophetic utterance": "I turned to the man next to me, and said: 'If he goes down in that spirit, I give him six weeks to live.'"

Even without Weigall's input, many were all too eager to see the hand of the otherworldly, and the press were only too happy to follow up their sober obituaries with titillating nonsense.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, speaking to newsmen in New York, blamed "an evil elemental", and the long reach of the Press Association gleefully distributed his claims across the globe. The author had long since squandered any respectability through his increased obsession with the supernatural and bitter public spats, but Conan Doyle's outlandish pronouncements made for great copy, and a good story always carries further than the truth.

With the conviction of the true believer, Conan Doyle explained that "There was once a mummy in the British Museum [...] which it was believed was guarded by one of those elementals, for everyone who came into contact with it came to grief. This was the mummy of a Queen, and even one of my dear friends, a journalist, who investigated the misfortunes that befell those who handled the mummy, was himself stricken with typhoid fever and died."

As if the credulous Conan Doyle wasn't enough, Marie Corelli wrote to the *New York World* to warn that "Some risks are run by breaking into the last resting place of a King of Egypt, whose tomb is specially and solemnly guarded, and robbing him of his possessions. According to a rare book I possess entitled *The Egyptian History Of The Pyramids*, the most dire punishment follows a rash intruder into a sealed tomb."

Corelli's intervention carried as much weight as Conan Doyle's. Although her name has now been largely forgotten, she was a sensation – a sort of softcore Stephenie Meyer who once counted Queen Victoria among her readers.

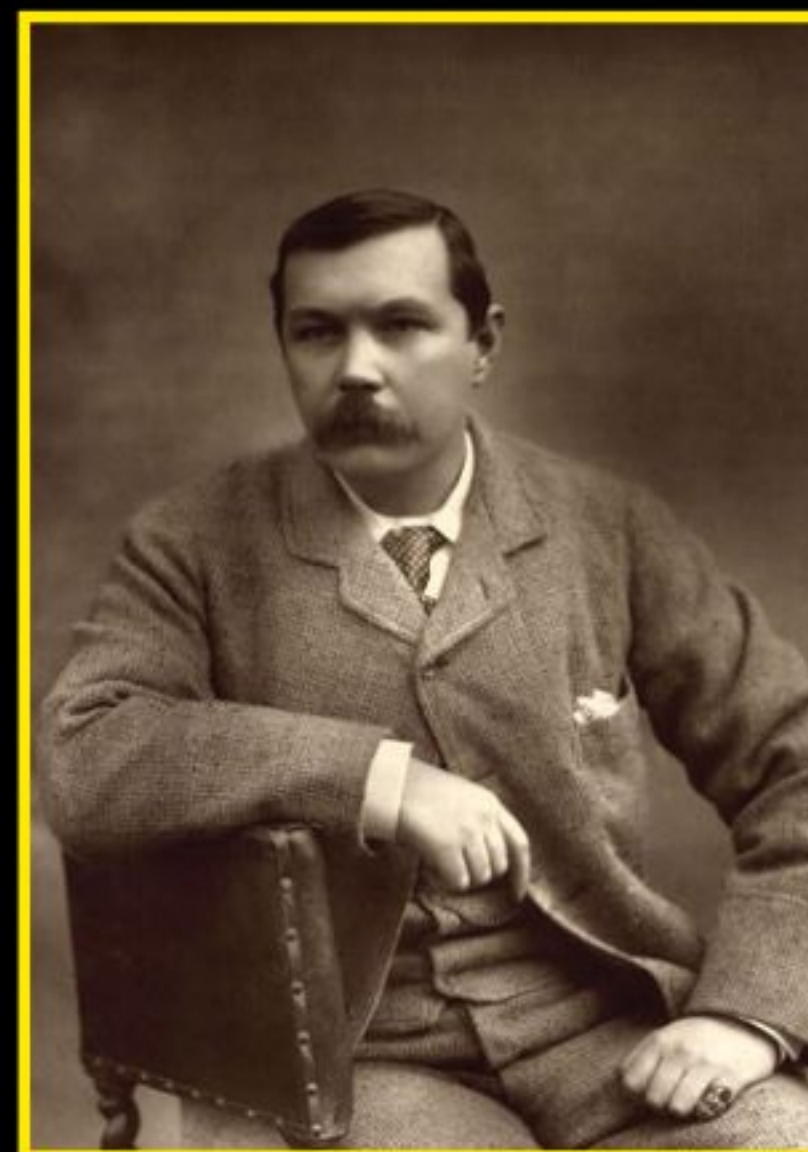
That Egyptologists took every opportunity to dismiss talk of curses, or that the British Museum had no

knowledge of the mummy Conan Doyle referred to, did little to stem the flow. Even high-profile interventions from Houdini and Haggard were destined to attract little attention compared to the ghoulish interventions of fiction's finest.

Soon, every fatality or misfortune with even the slimmest connection to the dig (up to and including the sinking of the Titanic) was being blamed on the Curse of the Pharaohs, while ignoring those at the heart of the excavation who lived to a ripe old age. Weigall's own death in 1934 was laid at Tutankhamun's wattled feet as stories grew ever more outlandish, leading author Evelyn Waugh (who, incidentally, was married to Carnarvon's niece) to growl that the whole thing had been "vulgarised in the popular press", and that following the earl's death, "the nation wallowed in superstitious depths."

There's absolutely no doubt that Universal's Carl Laemmle Jr was familiar with these superstitious depths and the public's appetite for them. The process of excavating the tomb lasted until 1932, and the ongoing 'Tutmania' had driven his demands for an Egyptian-themed shocker, but it took John L Balderston to close the loop.

Credited with adding much of the archaeological reality to *The Mummy*,



ABOVE
Sherlock Holmes creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle did much to propagate the 'curse' myth

journalist-turned-screenwriter Balderston had actually covered the 1925 opening of Tutankhamun's sarcophagus for the *New York World*, and left a recommendation in an early script that they refer to one of Arthur Weigall's books for ideas on costume design.

That Karloff's make-up for his mummified guise was clearly inspired by Rameses III, and the film's fictional *Scroll Of Thoth* was a direct copy of the British Museum's *Book Of The Dead*, can perhaps seen as further evidence of the writer's fidelity. The most direct nod to Balderston's earlier encounter, however, is the character of Anck-es-en-Amon, played by the magnetic Zita Johann. The name of Imhotep's reincarnated love was in actuality the real wife of Tutankhamun, whose two stillborn daughters were buried alongside him.

It wasn't just Tut that guided his hand though. In a curious callback to the dawn of 'mummy horror', Balderston was simultaneously working on an adaptation of Haggard's *She* for Universal, and though this vision never saw the light of day, the similarities between the two tales are indeed striking.

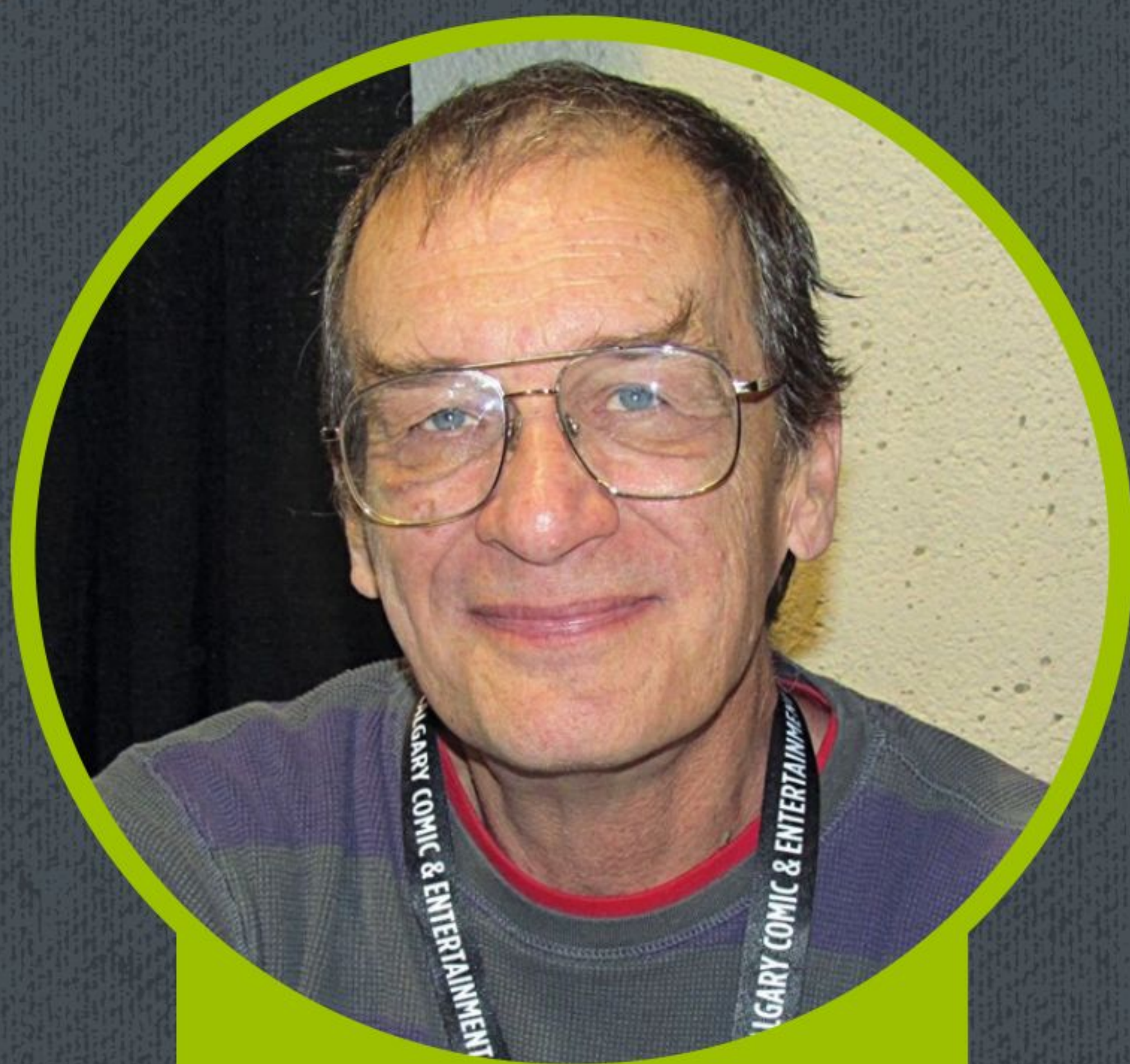
That's reincarnation for you – a fitting theme for the evolution of the Mummy. 

BELOW
The 1932 film of *The Mummy* acknowledged people's superstitions



Swamp King

From the Shadows He Came...
Russell Sheath remembers legendary
comic-book artist Bernie Wrightson



The comic-book community was saddened when it lost one of its most influential figures, *Swamp Thing* creator and artist Bernie Wrightson, following a lengthy battle with cancer. As the likes of Neil Gaiman and Stephen King took to social media to pay tribute, *Horrorville* takes you on a journey through just some of the career highlights of the master of horror illustration.

Bernie Wrightson developed his own talent by absorbing the horror and fantasy comics of his youth, a passion that led to the emerging artist's first work as a newspaper illustrator in the late Sixties. It was a meeting with iconic fantasy artist Frank Frazetta at a comic-book convention that would inspire Wrightson to show his art samples to DC Comics Editor Dick Giordano, gaining the artist his first professional comics work in 1968's *House Of Mystery* #179.

Wrightson's work, defined by his evocative use of inks via pen, ink and washes, would quickly become as iconic as the characters he would portray in his art and, together with his own influences, made Wrightson a perfect match for the horror, science fiction and mystery comics that were prevalent in comics throughout the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies, and helped him forge a career of acclaimed work at both Marvel and DC, as well with a number of indie publishers.

Commanding a diverse fanbase, with artists and contemporaries such as Walt Simonson, Mike Mignola, Neil Gaiman and Marc Silvestri each citing Wrightson's work as an influence, he would also find fans away from comics in the form of filmmaker Guillermo del Toro and horror aficionado and Metallica guitarist Kirk Hammett, to name but two.

Here, we offer you some of our highlights from Wrightson's expansive and impressive career. Seek them out if you dare!

Bernie Wrightson's Frankenstein

While it is almost impossible to pick a sole highlight from a lifetime of acclaimed drawings, arguably his work that is discussed with reverence the most is Wrightson's illustrated edition of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Bernie Wrightson's *Frankenstein* was seven years in the making, with the artist

creating the illustrations in between paid work in what Wrightson himself described as "a labour of love".

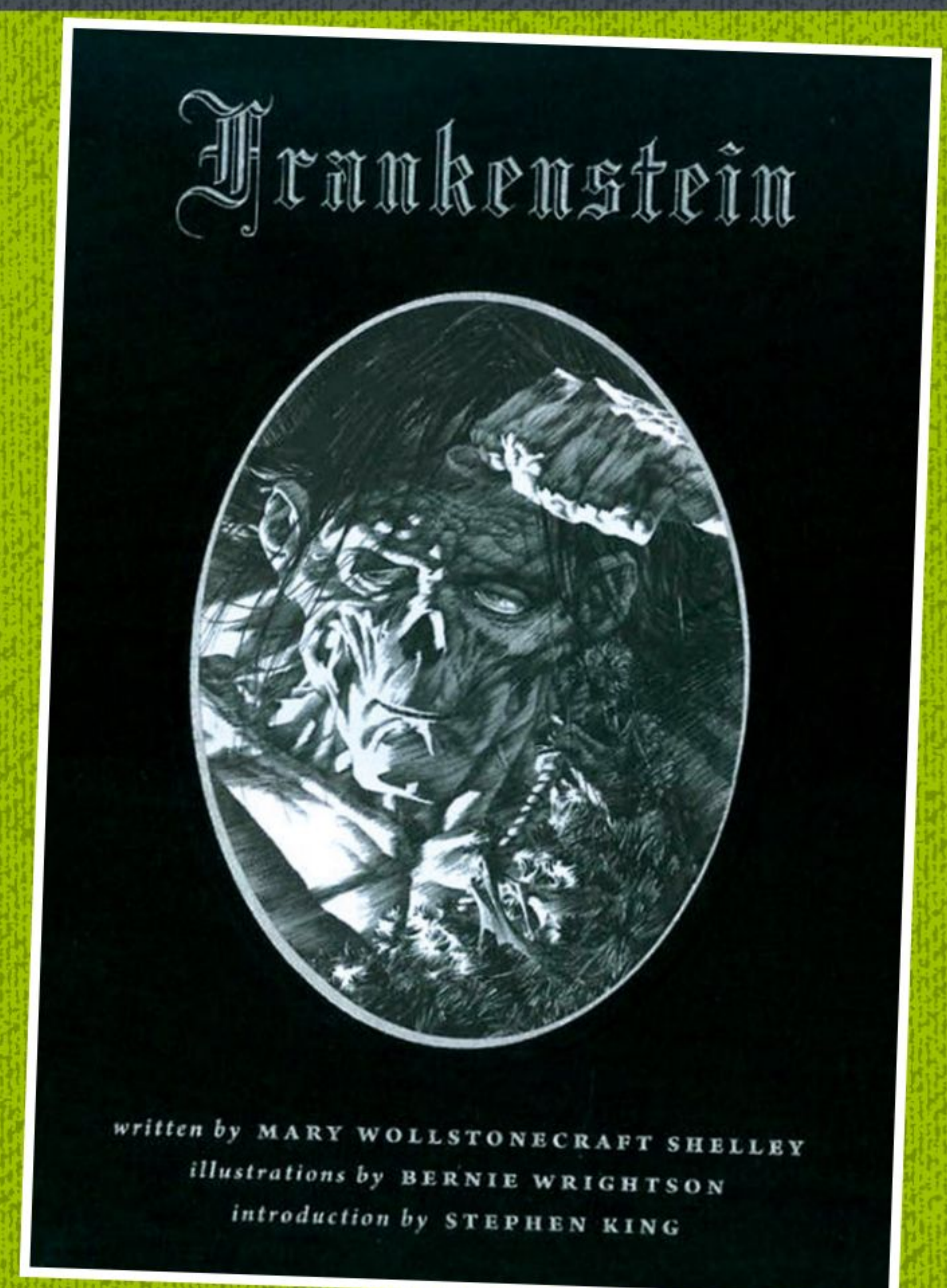
With his classic horror sensibilities, Wrightson would depart from the popular interpretation of the creature at the time, seen in the likes of Hammer Horror and Universal Monster movies, instead

drawing his inspiration directly from Shelley's own description of the creature.

Published by Marvel in 1983, with later editions from Dark Horse, Wrightson's illustrations accompanied Shelley's novel in full, and are widely regarded as among his most influential work, with the likes of Guillermo del Toro owning several of the original pieces from the book.



His work on *Frankenstein* is arguably his most famed



Wrightson would return to *Frankenstein* in 2012 with the award-winning *Frankenstein Alive, Alive*, a follow-up to the 1983 version, penned by Steve Niles (*30 Days Of Night*) and published by IDW.

Swamp Thing

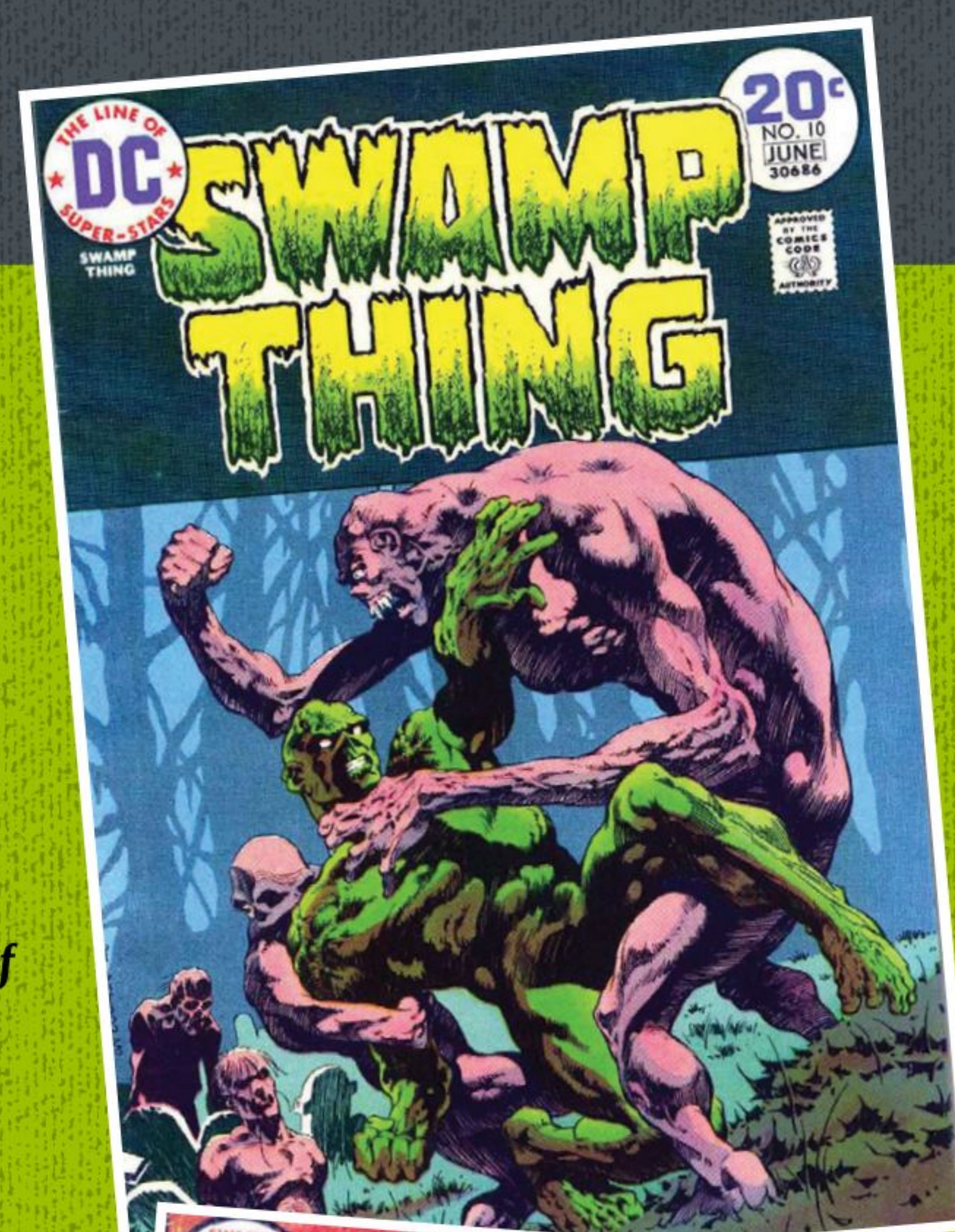
While Wrightson had worked for DC off and on throughout his career, when the artist returned to the comics powerhouse in the early Seventies, he would go on to once again bring his classic horror influences to mainstream comics as the co-creator of the monstrous Swamp Thing.

Described by Neal Adams as “looking like a mix between Frank Frazetta and EC Horror comics”, Wrightson’s art proved a dark contrast to the clean-cut styles of his

contemporaries, influenced by the likes of Jack Kirby and Adams himself, which permeated superhero comics at the time.

Together with writer and Wolverine co-creator Len Wein, Bernie Wrightson created the ‘muck monster’ Swamp Thing, first appearing in a short story for the horror, sci-fi and fantasy anthology *House Of Secrets*. Resurrecting the creature in a more contemporary setting amid the regular DC universe a year later, Wrightson would

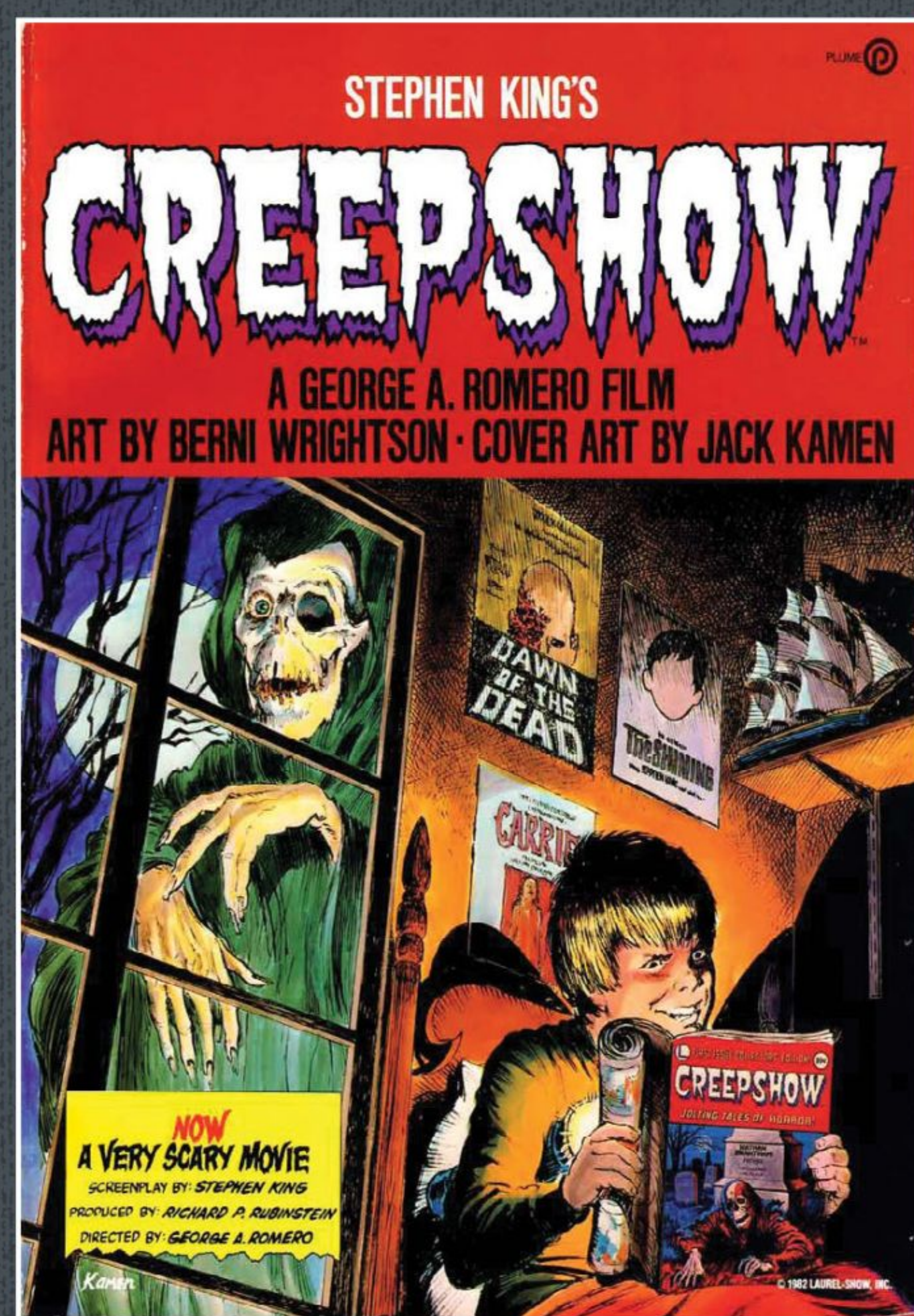
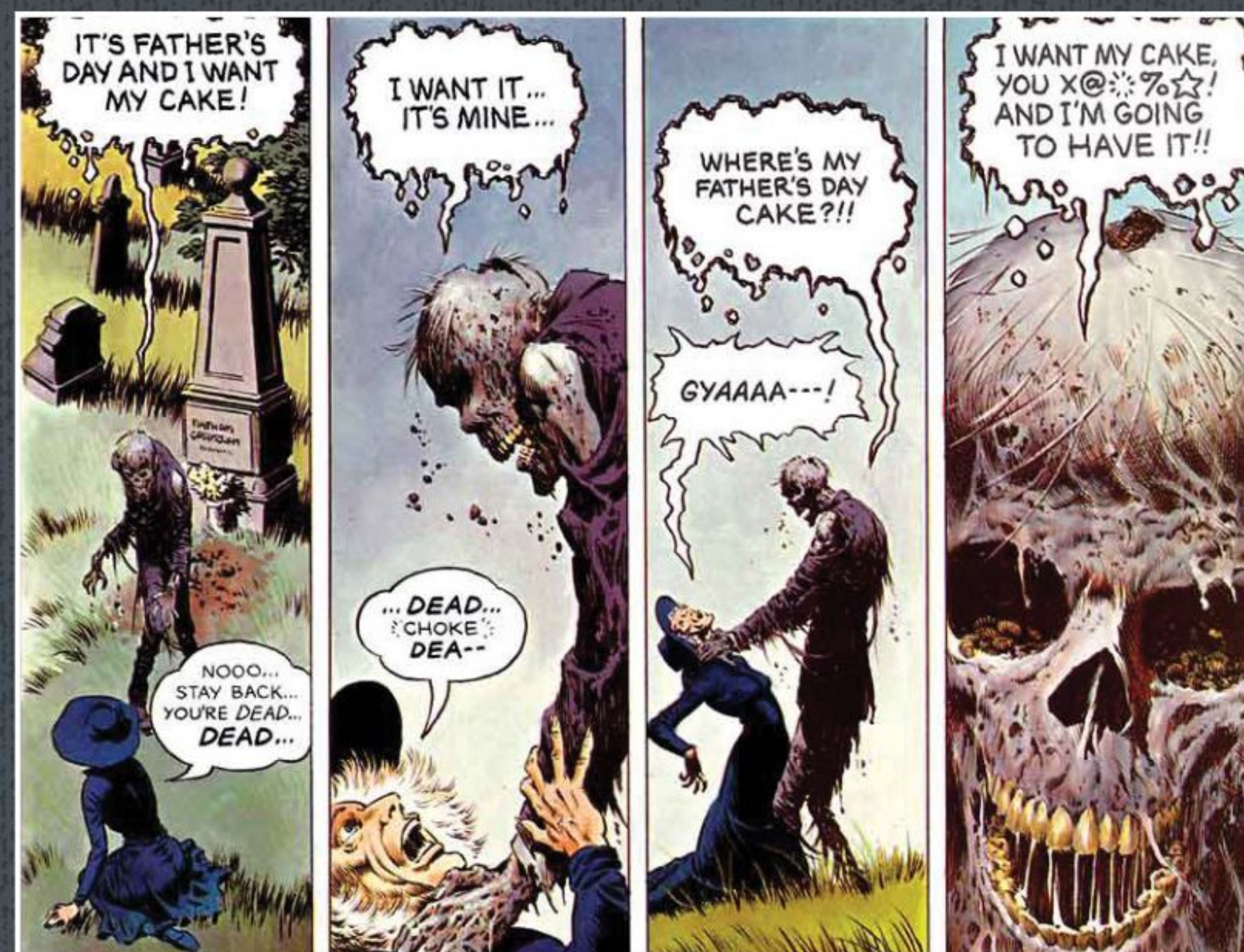
remain on art duties for the first ten issues of the series. *Swamp Thing* would become noted as a title that offered a number of emerging British comics talents some of their earliest US work. Writers including Alan Moore, Grant Morrison and Mark Millar all count *Swamp Thing* among their break-out work for a US publisher.

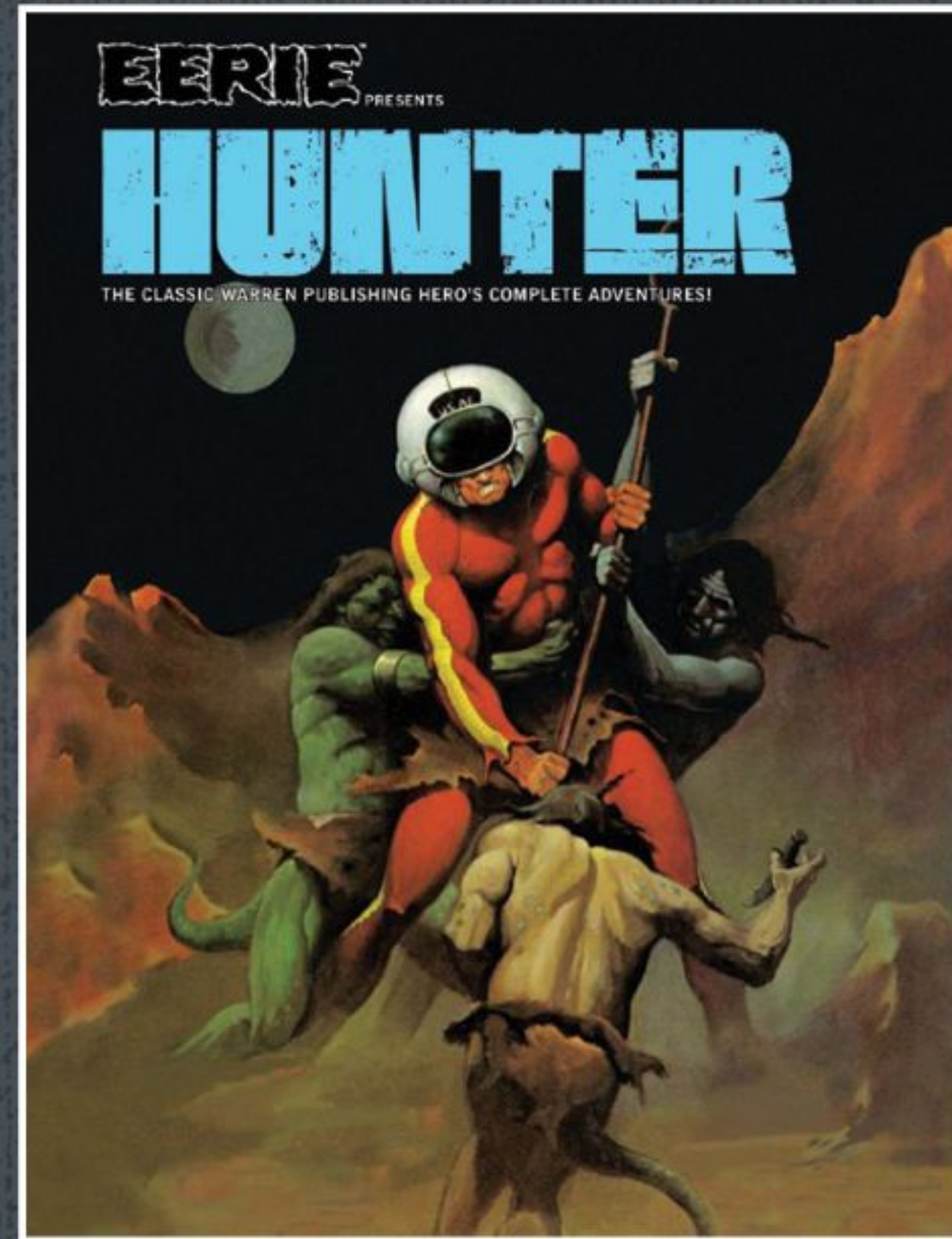
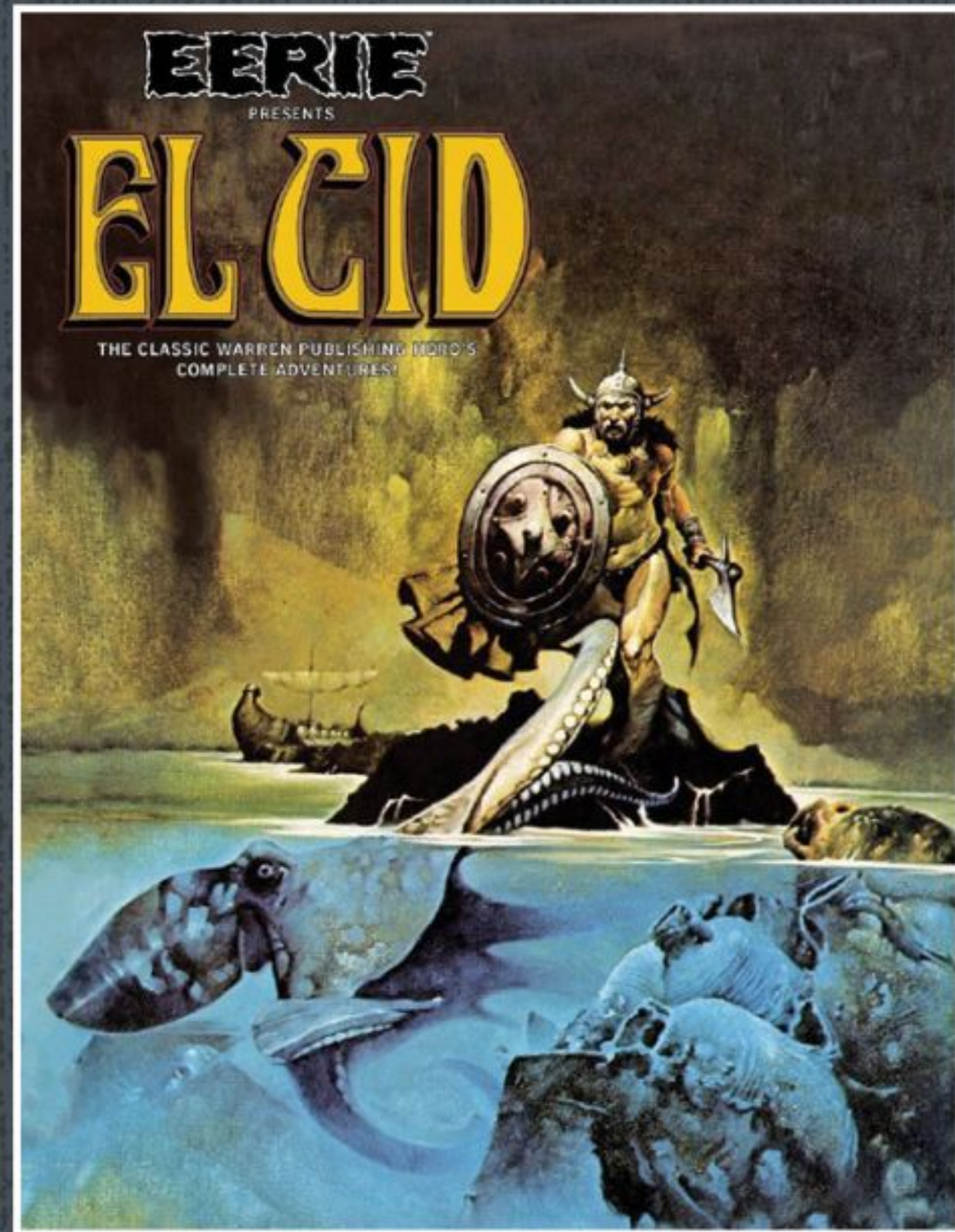
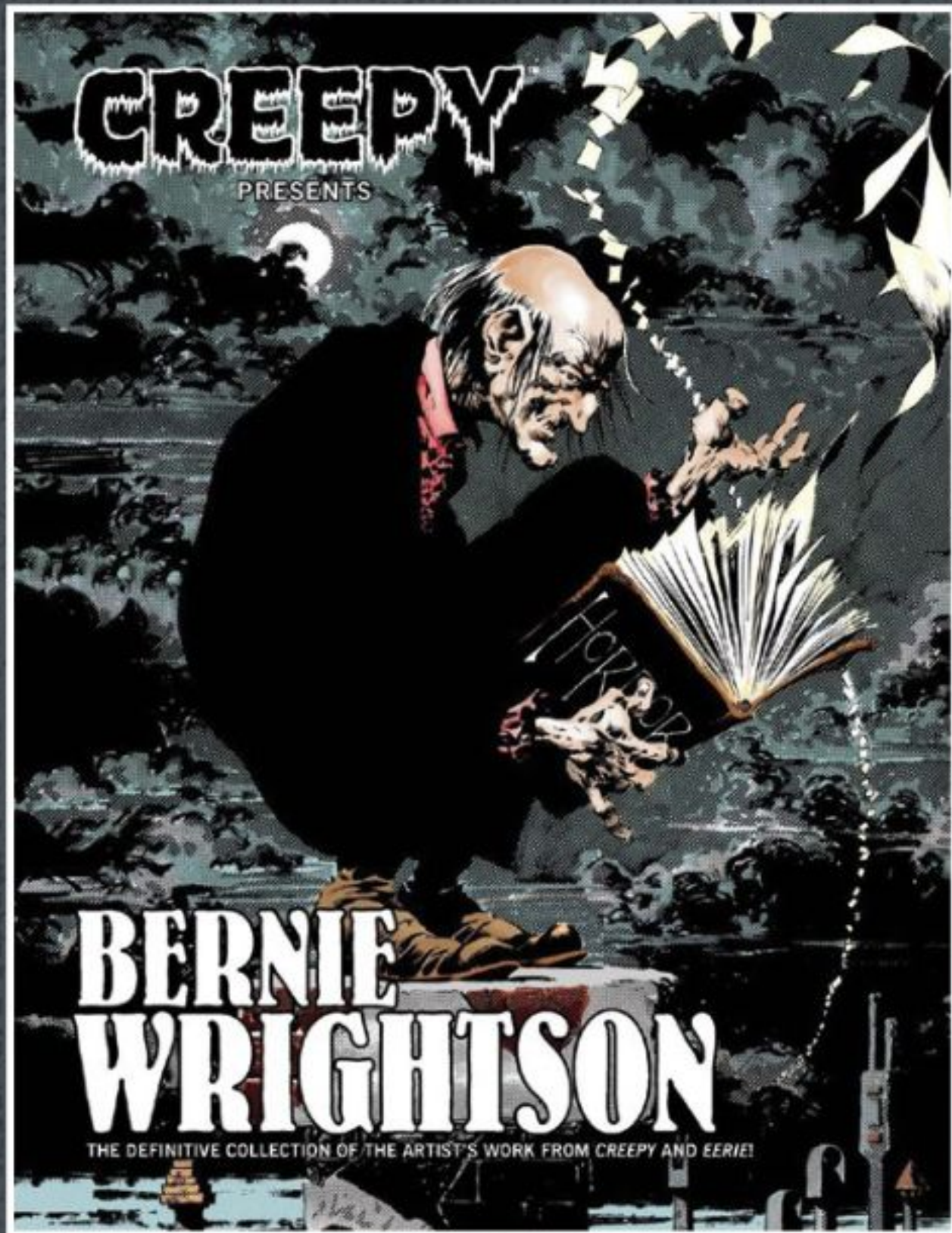


Stephen King

It is no surprise that two masters of the macabre would eventually find each other, as Bernie Wrightson and Stephen King would collaborate on several projects together over the years. Described by King as “A good friend and a great collaborator”, Wrightson’s work, illustrating a comic-book adaptation of King’s movie *Creepshow* in

1983, would lead to many collaborations. With Wrightson providing illustrations rather than straight-up comic-book adaptations of King’s work, *Cycle Of The Werewolf*, *The Stand*, *Dark Tower* and *Wolves Of The Calla* each featured Wrightson capturing Stephen King’s work in his distinctive style.





The Warren Years

As much a match made in heaven that Bernie Wrightson and Stephen King's work would prove to become, it would only be a matter of time before Wrightson's work appeared in the pages of the iconic horror comics published by Warren Publishing, including flagship titles *Creepy* and *Eerie*.

At Warren, Wrightson was in excellent company, as since its inception in the late 1950s, Warren's comics and magazines would feature work by luminaries like Neal Adams, Frank Frazetta, Al Williamson, Alex Toth, Boris Vallejo and Wally Wood, to name a few.

With Wrightson's own comic-book origins and artistic influences drawn from reading classic EC Comics such as *Incredible Science Fiction*, *Weird Fantasy* and *Tales From The Crypt*, at Warren, Wrightson would cement his legacy as an iconic horror artist, illustrating stories drawn from the works of

such icons as HP Lovecraft and Edgar Allan Poe.

A collection of Wrightson's work for Warren entitled *Creepy Presents Bernie Wrightson* was published in 2011.



Marvel & DC

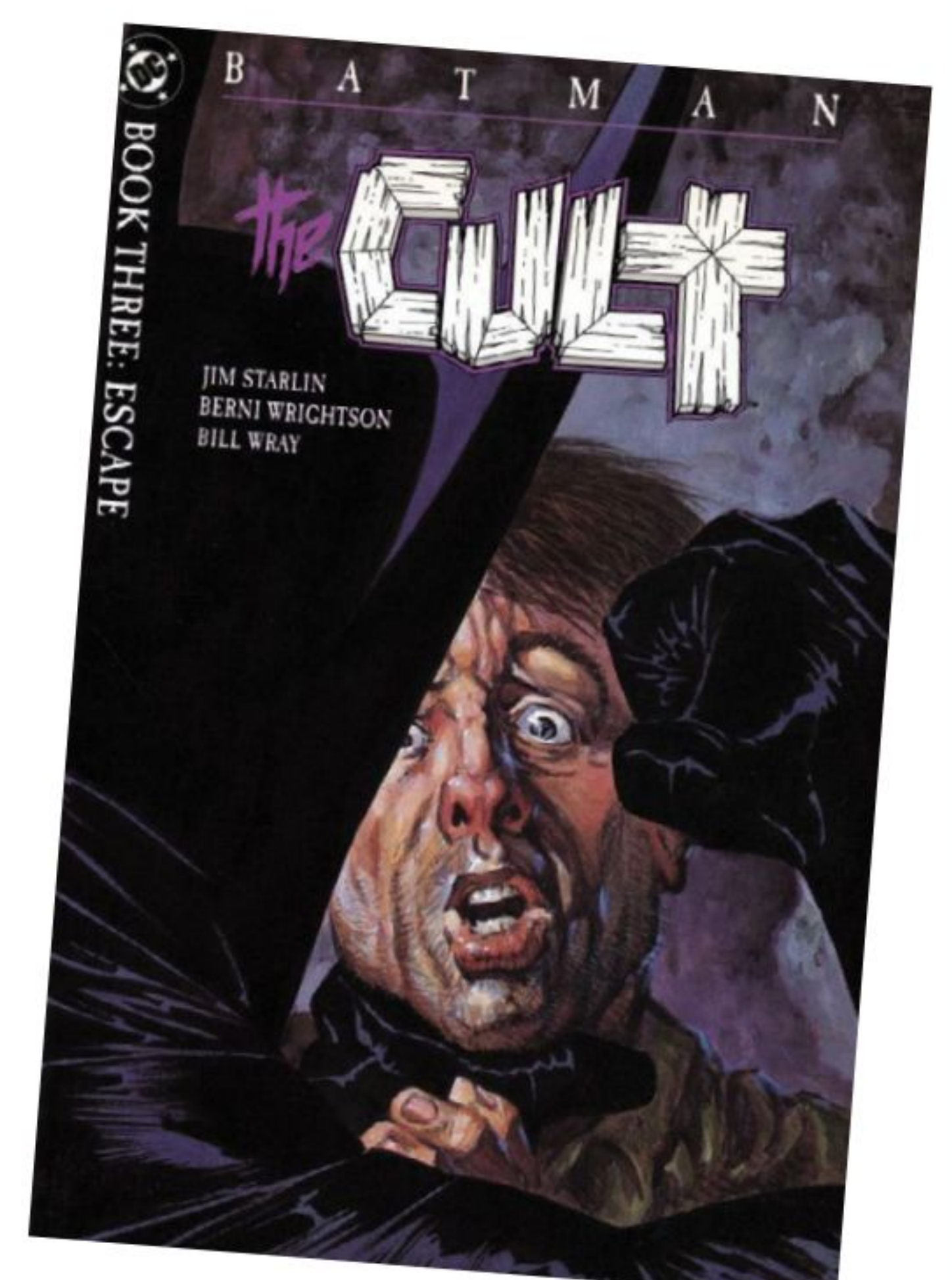
While Bernie Wrightson's most iconic work would be found within the horror genre, he would also tackle more mainstream superhero action. For Marvel, he didn't stray too far from genre, with *Spider-Man: Hooky* and later Marvel Knight's *Punisher* series, *Purgatory*.

At DC, Wrightson would lend his talents to the Dark Knight's adventures in *Batman: The Cult*, as well as creating *The Weird*, a character who would appear in his own self-titled series, co-created by writer Jim Starlin.

Supporting charitable efforts by both Marvel and DC, primarily to raise money to combat famine in Africa, Wrightson contributed to 'Heroes for Hope' a Marvel 'all-star' jam book, which featured a number of writers and artists. Wrightson joined Stephen King and George RR Martin, along with fellow artists, including Frank Miller and Howard Chaykin, in the effort.

'Heroes Against Hunger' was DC's answer to supporting the crisis in Africa, and Wrightson would join another stellar line-up of creators, this time on writing chores, and provide several pages of art for the Superman/Batman team-up.

In a message on the official Bernie Wrightson website, his wife Liz said that a celebration of Bernie's life is planned for later in 2017.



The Studio

While at Warren, Bernie Wrightson would also seek solace away from mainstream comics as part of the art collective known as *The Studio*. Sharing a Manhattan loft with like-minded talents Jeff Jones, Michael Kaluta and iconic *Wolverine* artist Barry Windsor-Smith, Wrightson would produce much of the art featured in *Frankenstein*, as well as numerous calendars, prints and illustrations for the likes of *National Lampoon* magazine. A book, simply entitled *The Studio*, featuring work from each of the artists, was published in 1979, with copies still available on the secondary market.



Hammer Glamour!

Calum Waddell meets horror icon Madeline Smith to reminisce on the House That Dripped Blood's latter days...

Actress Madeline Smith appeared in three of Hammer's most beloved latter-day classics – *Taste The Blood Of Dracula* (1970), *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) and *Frankenstein And The Monster From Hell* (1974), which would sadly become the studio's scary movie swansong.

Nevertheless, alongside *Theatre Of Blood* (1973), and her appearance as a Bond girl in *Live And Let Die* (1973), such credits have ensured that she remains a cult favourite to this day. **Horrorville** caught up with Smith to remember her days as a Scream Queen and sex symbol...

Tell us how you got involved in horror films...

Well, my very first one was *Taste The Blood Of Dracula*. I had done a few things before that, but that was my introduction to Hammer, and they kept me around to do *The Vampire Lovers*. And somewhere in between the two I did a movie called *Goodbye Gemini*. I don't even know if I am credited – I worked for two days in a party scene with Michael Redgrave. Then I did *Frankenstein And The Monster From Hell* for Hammer and *Theatre Of Blood*. But *Frankenstein And The Monster From Hell* came out many years later. We finished it in 1971, but it took three more years to come out, as Hammer were struggling for distribution.

Could you tell when you were making *Frankenstein And The Monster From Hell* that Hammer was coming to an end?

It was even clear from *The Vampire Lovers*. When I did that movie there was a lot of "Madeline, you need to attend this party, and then this one and then this one," because they wanted me to be there to meet these different investors from various countries. We all had to do that. Hammer was becoming more and more dependent on co-financing, and that obviously meant they were in trouble.

***Frankenstein And The Monster From Hell* was also the last film that the late, great Terence Fisher ever helmed. What do you remember about this celebrated director?**

Terence was a very mild and shy man. He was silent, and you could hear a pin drop on the set. For directions he would whisper, "Could you just come over here", and he would tell you what he was after.

And another legend you worked with on that film was Peter Cushing...

That was the only chance I had to get to know Peter Cushing... He was in *The Vampire Lovers*, but I never had many scenes with him. On *Frankenstein And The Monster From Hell*, he was really broken up from his wife's death – it had made him quite sick and frail. He was still devoted to the film, but he was very weak and unhappy at that time. He would sit in one corner, and Terence and I would be in the other – it was the quietest film I ever made.

Let's go back to *The Vampire Lovers*. What was your co-star Ingrid Pitt like to work with? She is another great Hammer legend that we have, sadly, lost...

Ingrid could be a little, shall we say, difficult, but she was very sweet at heart, and I always knew that. She was only a year or two older than I was, and she was supposed to be playing someone a bit more mature in years, which she did very convincingly. She got very into the role, and we worked well together. I was very sad to hear about her death – she had rotten luck and bad health for years.

Quite unusually for Hammer, *The Vampire Lovers* was a lot more sexually explicit than their usual fare...

Yes, I had to bare all, and it was for the Japanese audience originally! I was told it would only be

seen in Japan, which turned out to be a massive lie, because now everyone has seen it all [laughs]. After each love scene they would say, "Excuse me Madeline, but can we do that again for Japan? It just means you will be showing a bit more..." Anyway, that was quite nerve-racking. But it was a good set actually – everyone got along very well.

How did you feel about the same-sex theatrics of *The Vampire Lovers*? It was a very different era...

I loved it! We were starting to go into some very provocative areas back then, and I thought that was great. I was coming from the swinging Sixties, and it was a brilliant period. Some of us were very liberally minded, and it has now shown how far ahead of our time we were!

Another horror classic you worked on was *Theatre Of Blood*. What are your memories of this?

Well, it was a bit of a rush job actually [laughs]. It had to be made in just six weeks, so a lot of the parts got cut down, mine included. *Theatre Of Blood* crept out at the time with very little fanfare, and no one really saw it. But I loved making it – although it was done during a very hot summer, and we were all exhausted. It has since gone on to be something of a little cult classic, hasn't it? From what I understand it played on television a lot, and that is how people discovered it.

Finally, how does it feel to be remembered from this great time in British horror?

I am amazed to be remembered at all [laughs]. I was lucky to get my start in the period I did, because I was allowed to be glamorous and sexy, and just be myself a lot of time! It was a wonderful era to be an actress, and I am proud of everything I appeared in.



The Thinking Dead

Mike Carey tells Stephen Jewell about his *The Girl With All The Gifts* prequel, *The Boy On The Bridge*

After the definitive conclusion of *The Girl With All The Gifts*, Mike ‘MR’ Carey always knew that it was going to be difficult to write a follow-up that was set in the immediate aftermath of his best-selling novel. Now, after penning the screenplay for last year’s bravura cinematic adaptation, the north London-based author has returned to the post-apocalyptic Britain of Melanie and Miss Justineau in *The Boy On The Bridge*. But although it opens a decade before the events of the first book, he insists that it is not exactly a prequel...

“It’s sort of a prequel/sequel in that it starts before *The Girl With All The Gifts* and finishes later,” he explains. “Most of the action takes place before that, but it’s a freestanding story that is set in the same world and against the backdrop of the same events.”

But while a straightforward continuation wasn’t viable, there were aspects of how the UK was so radically transformed by *Ophiocordyceps Unilateralis* that intrigued Carey. “I didn’t want to do a sequel because the ending of *The Girl With All The Gifts* was such a game changer, and not just for

the characters, but the entire world,” he explains. “So it felt to me that a sequel would have to be in a completely different genre. But it occurred to me that there was a story to be told in the negative space of *Girl With All The Gifts* that would be interesting in its own right, and would also shine some interesting sidelights on the earlier novel.”

However, *The Boy On The Bridge* doesn’t chronicle the initial breakdown of the previous society. “It’s not the outbreak story,” says Carey. “It’s set some years after that, although we get a few flashbacks to those events. But at the time of

MIKE CAREY





ABOVE
The Girl With All the Gifts was a filmic hit in 2016 for director Colm McCarthy

BELOW
The Boy On The Bridge isn't a sequel to *The Girl With All the Gifts*, but it is related

this story, Beacon already exists. The surviving uninfected humans have retreated from London to the south coast, and the rest of the British Isles have been left to the hungries. It's a time when Beacon is still deciding what kind of society it wants to be, so in that sense it's an origin story."

The Boy On The Bridge charts the ill-fated voyage of the mobile laboratory, the Rosalind Franklin, which departs from human outpost Beacon on a quest to find out more about the fungal plague that has turned the majority of the population into flesh-eating hungries, only to later be discovered abandoned on a London street in *The Girl With All the Gifts*.

"In the novel, there's a single dead body in the cockpit, but in the movie it was completely empty," says Carey. "*The Boy On The Bridge* is the story of that journey: what the Rosalind Franklin was doing, who its crew were, what its mission was, and what became of them. It's also the story of the first encounter between humanity, or Humanity 1.0, and the feral children."

Like fellow bus, the Charles Darwin, which also meets a grisly end, the Rosalind Franklin takes its name from – in its case – an under-appreciated scientific pioneer. "Charles Darwin is an obvious choice for a zombie apocalypse story, because he was the guy who came up with the theory of evolution by natural selection, which is

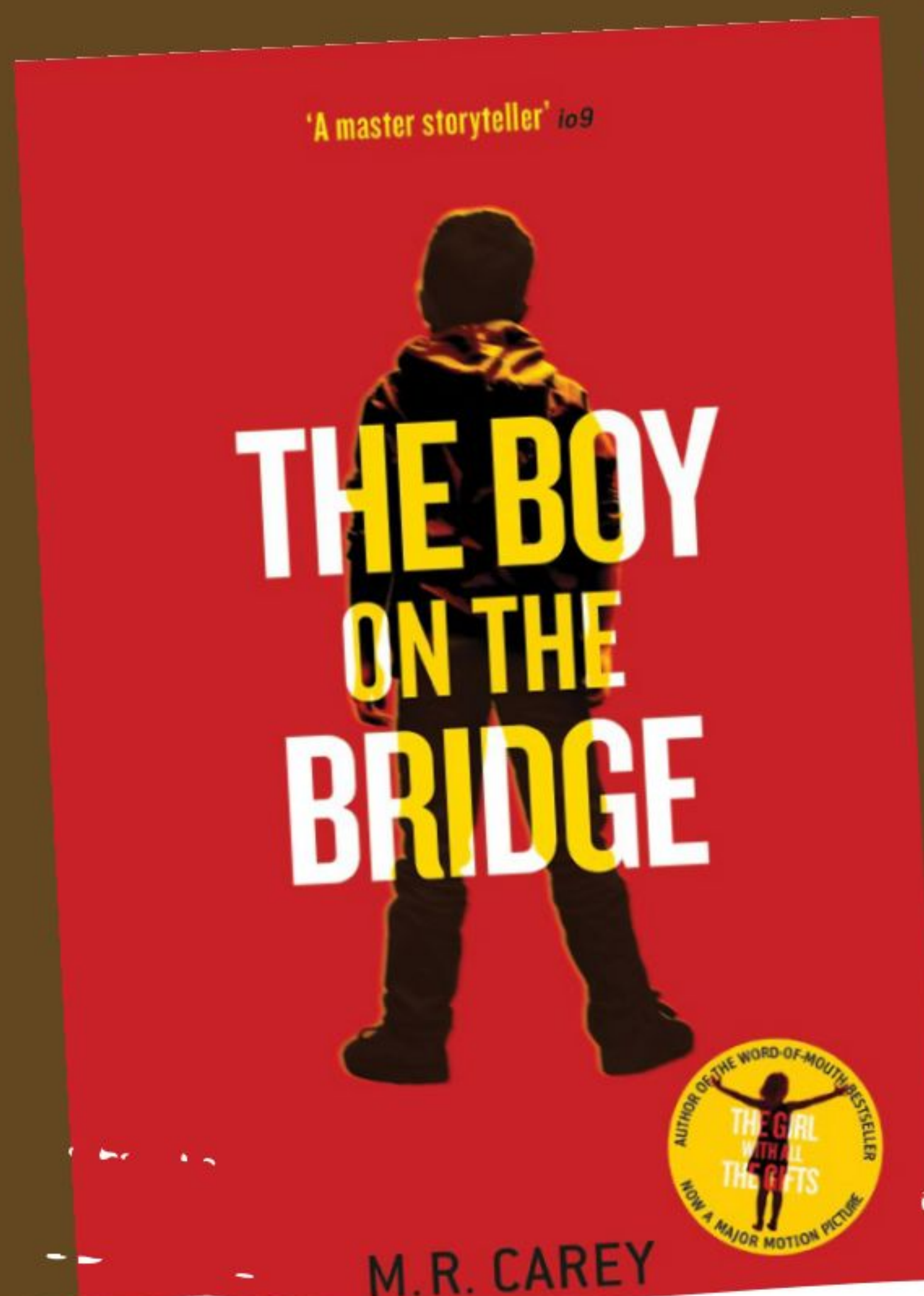
ultimately what *The Girl With All the Gifts* is all about," laughs Carey. "Rosalind Franklin was the unsung hero of the discovery of DNA, and I chose her because she's both a mirror image of Charles Darwin and the opposite of him, because she never got that conventional fame in her lifetime. She contributed more than anyone to cracking the structure of DNA, and the Nobel Prize went to the men who were part of that effort, not to her."

Just as in *The Girl With All the Gifts*, that long-standing gender imbalance is embodied in the tension between the Rosalind Franklin's male and female inhabitants. "Maybe it's a sneaky nudge to the idea that there are stereotypically male and female ways of coming at problems," says Carey. "The book doesn't service those stereotypes, but as with *Girl*, a lot of the characters, including one of the two protagonists, are women. There are power games going on between the highest-status men on the Rosalind Franklin, and the women have their own view of that."

Describing it as "a microcosm of the struggle that's going on in society as a whole," there is also a noticeable divide between the Rosalind Franklin's scientists and their army counterparts. "The mission has two commanders: a military commander and a civil commander, and the civil commander to some extent has been co-opted by the military," says Carey. "The novel takes place at a time when the civil and military authorities in Beacon are arguing with each other about what kind of society it wants to be, how it will function and what its rules should be."

Just as Melanie and Dr Justineau were the pivotal figures in *The Girl With All the Gifts*, *The Boy On The Bridge* centres around the relationship between Dr Samrina Khan and teenage scientific genius, Stephen Greaves. "He's the guy who invented the e-blocker gel that allows humans to move among the hungries without being devoured, and is also the last and best hope for a cure to the hungry pathogen," says Carey. "He gets to meet the feral children, and make the first contact with the kids who are like Melanie, the second generation hungries, and his response to them is crucial in how the story unfolds."

The boy on the bridge of the title, Carey notes that Stephen "is on the autistic spectrum," and his idiosyncratic approach to life has a significant impact on what happens. "He's has some very rigid rules about interacting with other people," says Carey. "One of his hang-ups is that he doesn't like to lie, as he's terrified by uncertainty and likes things to be clear cut. That becomes a problem as the story progresses, as he has things





LEFT
The Boy on the Bridge takes place before we encounter Melanie

that he has to hide, even from Samrina, who he loves and regards as a surrogate mother.”

After excising them from the script, Carey has reintegrated *Mad Max*-esque survivalists, the Junkers, back into *The Boy On The Bridge*. “They have a very important part to play in the climax,” he says. “In *Girl*, they were part of the instigating, triggering event that launches Melanie and the others into the world, then they disappear as our focus shifts. It’s fair to say that the Junkers are a much more important plot point in *Boy*.”

And while you might think you know where the story is ultimately headed as the Rosalind Franklin’s final destination was confirmed in *The Girl With All The Gifts*, Carey insists that he still has some tantalising twists in store. “We do leave the

Rosalind Franklin where we expect it to be, but I can pretty much guarantee that anybody who reads *The Boy On The Bridge* will be surprised by the ending,” says Carey, who also includes some nods to the cast of *The Girl With All The Gifts*. “I wanted there to be rewards for people who have also read *Girl*, some things that would give them that pleasure of recognition and of knowing a little bit more about things that are just referred to tangentially here, but are actually essential to the plot of *Girl*. The coda bits at the very end, where you get some glimpses of the post-Melanie world, are also much richer if you’ve read *Girl* as well.”

The Boy On The Bridge is available to buy now, published by Orbit. Read our review on page 110.

The Comic With All The Gifts? Carey on keeping the story going

Having made his name writing series like *X-Men: Legacy*, *Lucifer* and *The Unwritten* for Marvel and DC, Mike Carey has also considered further exploring the world of *The Girl With All The Gifts* in comics. “I’ve certainly toyed with the idea, and keep seeing it in my head with Mike Perkins art,” he says, referring to his frequent collaborator on series such as last year’s haunted house miniseries *Rowans Ruin*. “But after talking to the movie’s producers, I decided to put it on hold until we’d rolled the film out. I could see a comic-book version working well, as there’s a big sprawling narrative spread over several decades, so there’s lots of gaps in which you could set the stories, revisiting the novel or weaving around it.”

He recently cut back on his comic book output to concentrate on novels and films, and his only regular title is now *Darkness Visible*, the IDW series that he co-created with *Dirk Gently* producer Arvind David. As with Carey’s *Felix Castor* novels, the Brendan Cahill-drawn monthly explores the darker, supernatural-tinged side of an alternate London, in which humanity has formed an unholy alliance with the demonic Shaitan.

“I love that kind of milieu,” says Carey. “There’s more of an emphasis on history here than with *Felix Castor*, as *Darkness Visible* has roots that go back a long way. We’re gradually teasing that out in a series of one-offs, starting with #3, which is set during World War II, and has Churchill making a Faustian pact on behalf of the whole British nation.”



FEATURE

RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE

ONE OF ITALY'S MOST CELEBRATED (AND CASTIGATED) SPLATTER-MOVIE MAVERICK SITS DOWN WITH CALUM WADDELL TO TALK ABOUT THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF CRAFTING A CANNIBAL FRY-UP ON CELLULOID IN THE FORM OF CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST, ONE OF THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL VIDEO NASTIES OF ALL TIME...

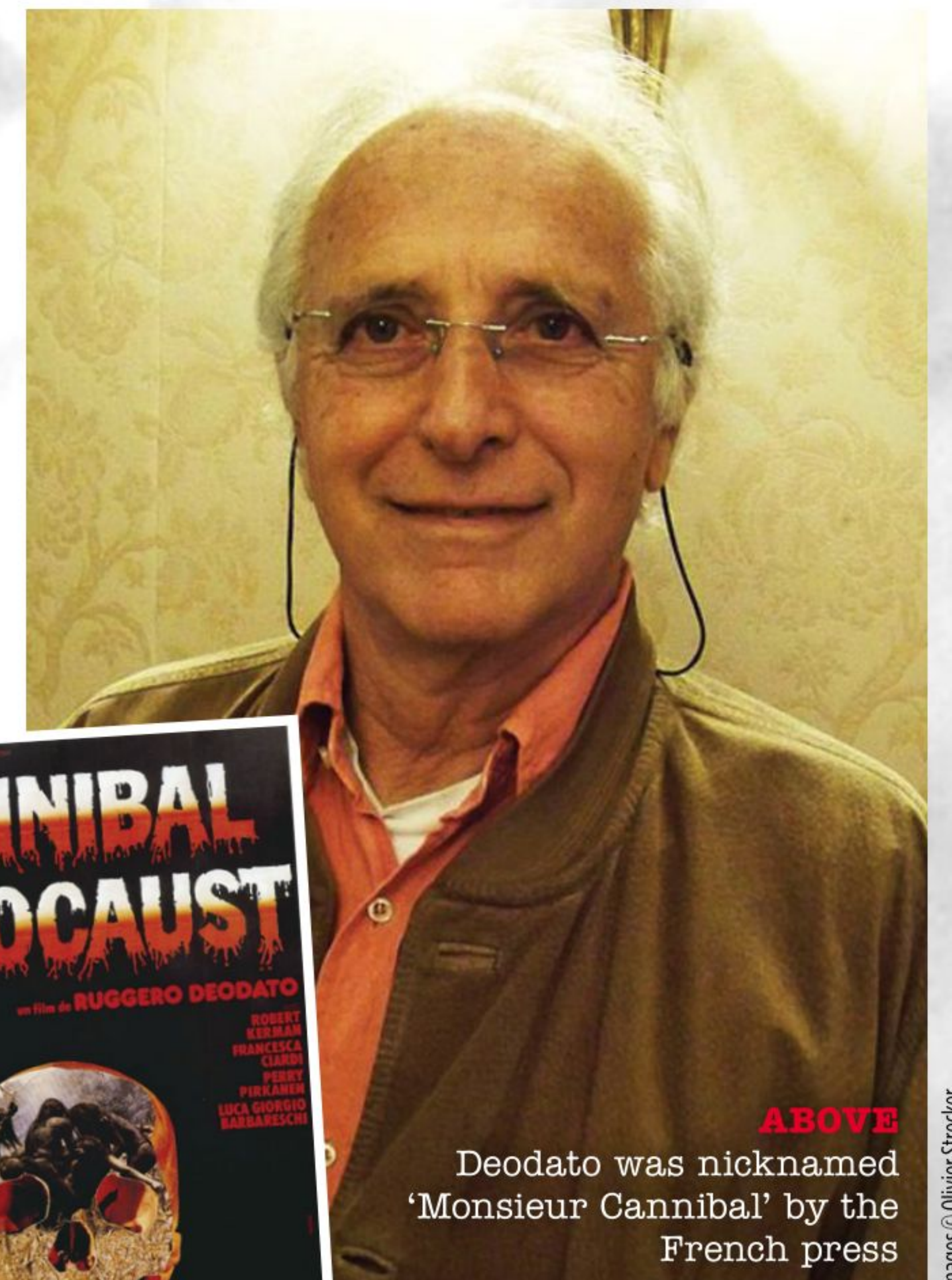
CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST

Of all the filmmakers who found themselves caught up in the notorious 'video nasty' net of the early Eighties, perhaps no one is more infamous than Ruggero Deodato. No less than two of his terror titles, *Cannibal Holocaust* and *House On The Edge Of The Park*, both released in 1980, were deemed to be obscene, and neither can be viewed in the UK uncut – even today.

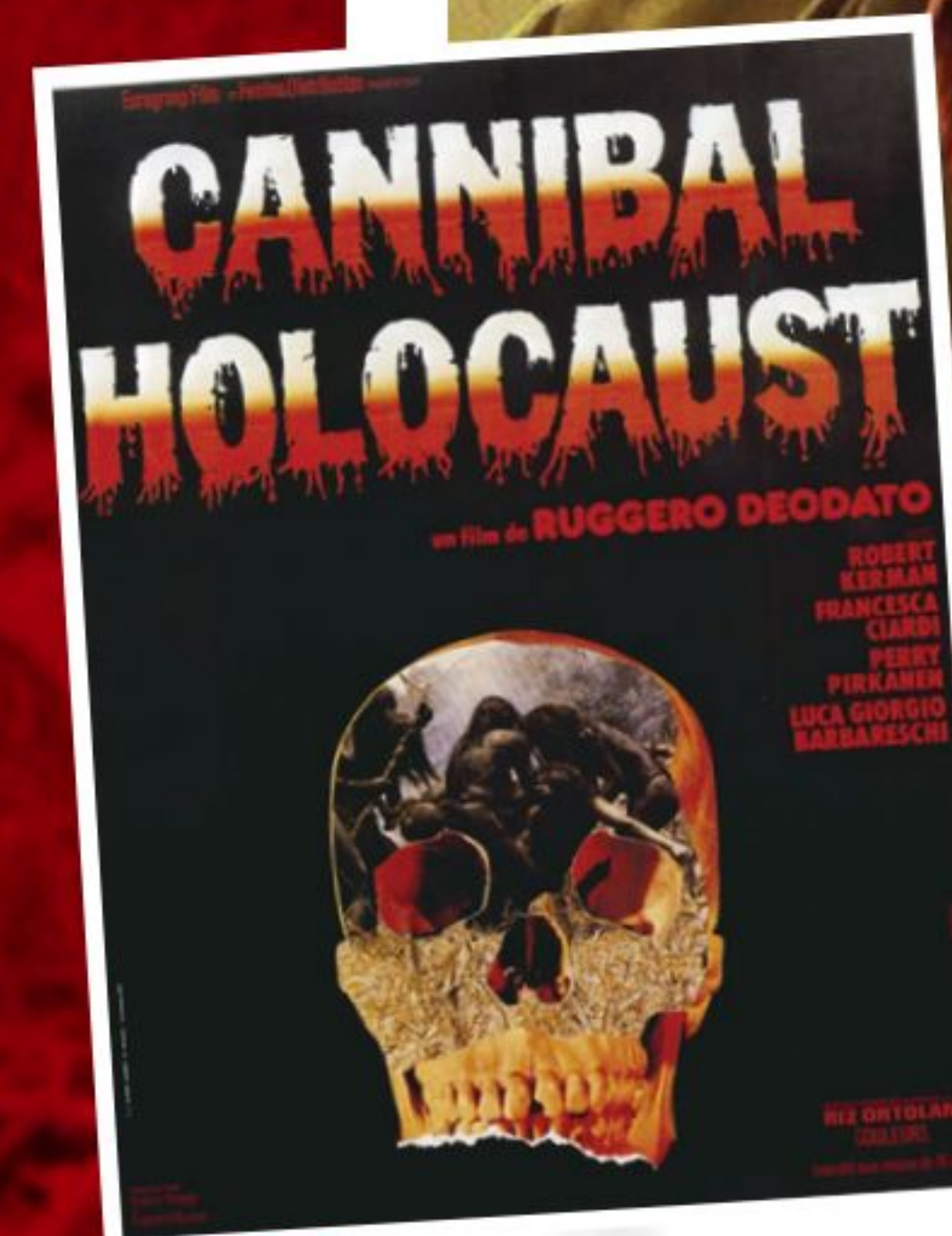
Of the pair, *Cannibal Holocaust* is by far the more influential and enduring. As one of the first ever found-footage films, it highlights a doomed American documentary team who tread further into the Amazon jungle in search of a legendary tribe of flesh-feasting savages. On the way, the group record themselves committing acts of rape, genocide and (real) animal cruelty, before they eventually meet their comeuppance at the hands of the very third-world inhabitants they intended to torment.

Initially released to widespread disdain, *Cannibal Holocaust* has since been reappraised as a gruelling but provocative gore epic that touches on such hot topics as Western post-colonial identity, imperial gain and third-world exploitation.

"The funding for the film came from Germany, Italy and Japan," begins Deodato. "It was quite a big budget, and the producers gave me the freedom to develop the story. I am not credited with the screenplay of *Cannibal Holocaust*, but I was heavily involved in writing it. I liked the idea that it began as a proper film, but then it became about another movie entirely – this fake documentary that was made by four young people who are shown to



ABOVE
Deodato was nicknamed 'Monsieur Cannibal' by the French press



FEATURE



ABOVE
Actors Perry Pirkanem and Luca Barbareschi in *Cannibal Holocaust*



ABOVE
Local Colombian natives played the cannibal tribe

» be increasingly more evil. They are journalists seduced by the idea of fame and money.”

However, shooting out in Leticia, a port in the Amazon jungle that is part of Colombia, but bordered by Peru and Brazil – and at the time, awash in drug smuggling and crime, Deodato began to lose his own grip on reality.

“We got some of our footage out of the country, and the producers screened it at MIFED – which was a big film market out in Milan at the time,” continues the director. “They were told that it looked so real, and that United Artists wanted to buy it for international distribution. So I was called in my hotel in Leticia and told, ‘Go even further – make it bloodier, make it more violent, everyone loves what they have seen.’ Lots of people complain that we killed real animals. But seeing live food served and killed was typical in many Asian

countries at the time. In restaurants in Japan and Thailand... and they had bought the movie. So why not show this? These films were a big success in that market. I still hear this: ‘How could he ever have killed a turtle?’ This was a different time in history. The Indio people were selling these turtles on the markets all across Leticia, so I never questioned it.”

When watching *Cannibal Holocaust* today, it is curious to comprehend how an audience existed for such atrocities – both real and faked (the haunting image of a tribal woman impaled through a stake has become Deodato’s trademark). Yet, only a few years prior to *Cannibal Holocaust*, Deodato had hit paydirt with a similarly themed film: 1977’s *Last Cannibal World*. Shot in the depths of the Malaysian rainforest, the movie – which charts a white explorer’s encounter with a stone-age gang of

meat-munching antagonists – was not quite as notorious as *Cannibal Holocaust*, but remains a fan favourite to this day.

“*Last Cannibal World* was the start of my career,” affirms Deodato. “Prior to this production, I had worked as an assistant to Roberto Rossellini – one of the founders of the Italian neo-realist tradition. So with *Last Cannibal World*, I just wanted to make a movie that the audience would believe might actually have happened. At the start of the film, we tell the viewer this is all based on facts – and I remember the producer getting angry at me because I said we had to go into the rainforest of Malaysia. He said, ‘We can save money and shoot this in a big national park I have found in [the capital] Kuala Lumpur – we will make this look like jungle.’ I said, ‘No, no, we should go right out into the depths of the forest.’”

“The first day on the set I got lost during my lunch break,” he laughs. “I went for a walk, and I could not find my way back for three hours. The crew was furious at me, because we slept on the set and we had very little food, no alcohol, no nothing... and leeches and snakes... plus it was difficult to get to sleep with the sound of the animals. I doubt anyone would suffer under these circumstances today! But *Last Cannibal World* was a huge success, and this is how *Cannibal Holocaust* came to be made.”

Unfortunately for Deodato, *Cannibal Holocaust* would cause him years of misery. Despite gaining wide theatrical stints in many European countries, including France and Spain, and playing to packed cinemas in Japan (where no less than Fox acquired the distribution rights), the movie was banned outright in many territories, and the director



ABOVE
Pirkanem refuses to discuss *Cannibal Holocaust* even today

became ostracised for his many stomach-churning set pieces.

"It was banned in Great Britain, and many other countries too," sighs the filmmaker. "I went to court in Italy because they believed I might have killed the actors – which was a ludicrous accusation, and one that was quickly thrown away. Nevertheless, United Artists decided they would have nothing to do with the film after that. So I lost America – in fact, it never came out in the United States until 1985, and even then it was a tiny release. I shot *House On The Edge Of The Park* while *Cannibal Holocaust* was in post-production, and that was also delayed in the USA – probably because of my name. *House on the Edge of the Park* was made very quickly, and

"I was told, 'Go even further – make it bloodier, make it more violent'"

for years I regretted that film because it also caused me trouble. Only recently have I begun to appreciate it – for instance, I think it has some ideas from *A Clockwork Orange*, and it holds up quite well."

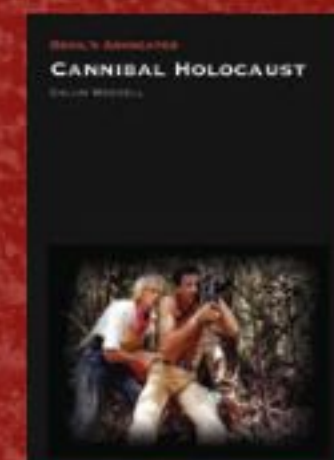
With *House On The Edge Of The Park* unspooling an especially unpleasant story of home invasion and sexual attack, Deodato was fast becoming associated with especially transgressive examples of hyper-violent cinema. Following these dubious exploitation achievements, however, the Italian horror master would divert into more lightweight

projects, such as the fantasy opus *Raiders Of Atlantis*. In 1985, however, he would make one final return to the jungle with *Cut And Run* – a more lavish story of Latin American decadence in which two Miami-based journalists investigate a vicious drug cartel that is based in the rainforest of Venezuela.

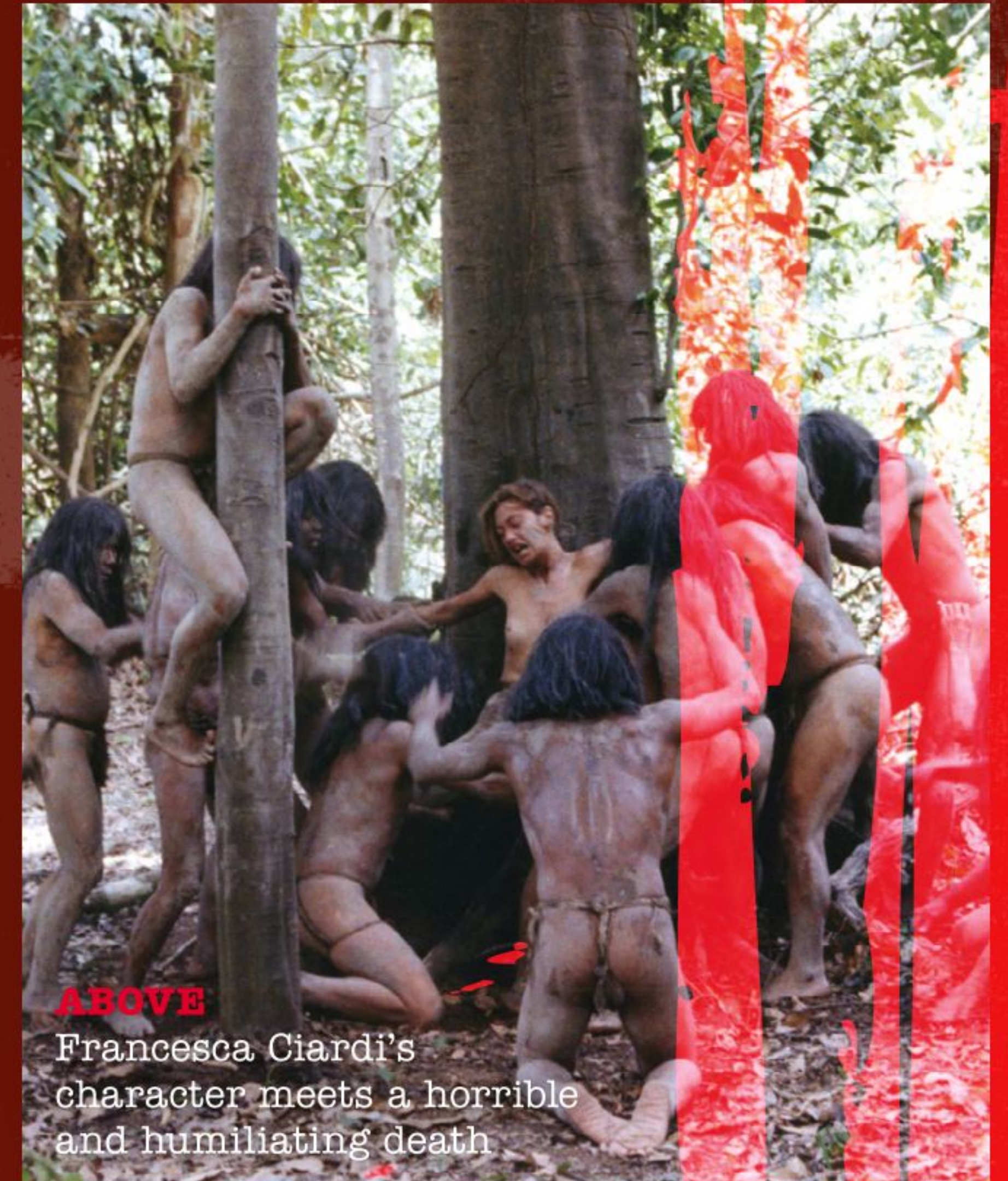
"The problem with *Cut And Run* is that the producers wanted *Cannibal Holocaust* part two," admits Deodato. "It was originally going to be made by Wes Craven, but when he left the project they hired me to do another cannibal movie. I said I could make a thriller in the jungle, and it could have some violence, but I did not want another story about tribes eating people [laughs]. So *Cut And Run* is a very different movie. It is a little more Hollywood, and we had some famous actors in there too, such as Karen Black, but it was not as successful as *Cannibal Holocaust*."

Indeed, Deodato remains attached to his censor-baiting blood fest – especially as a new generation of filmmakers have come to celebrate it.

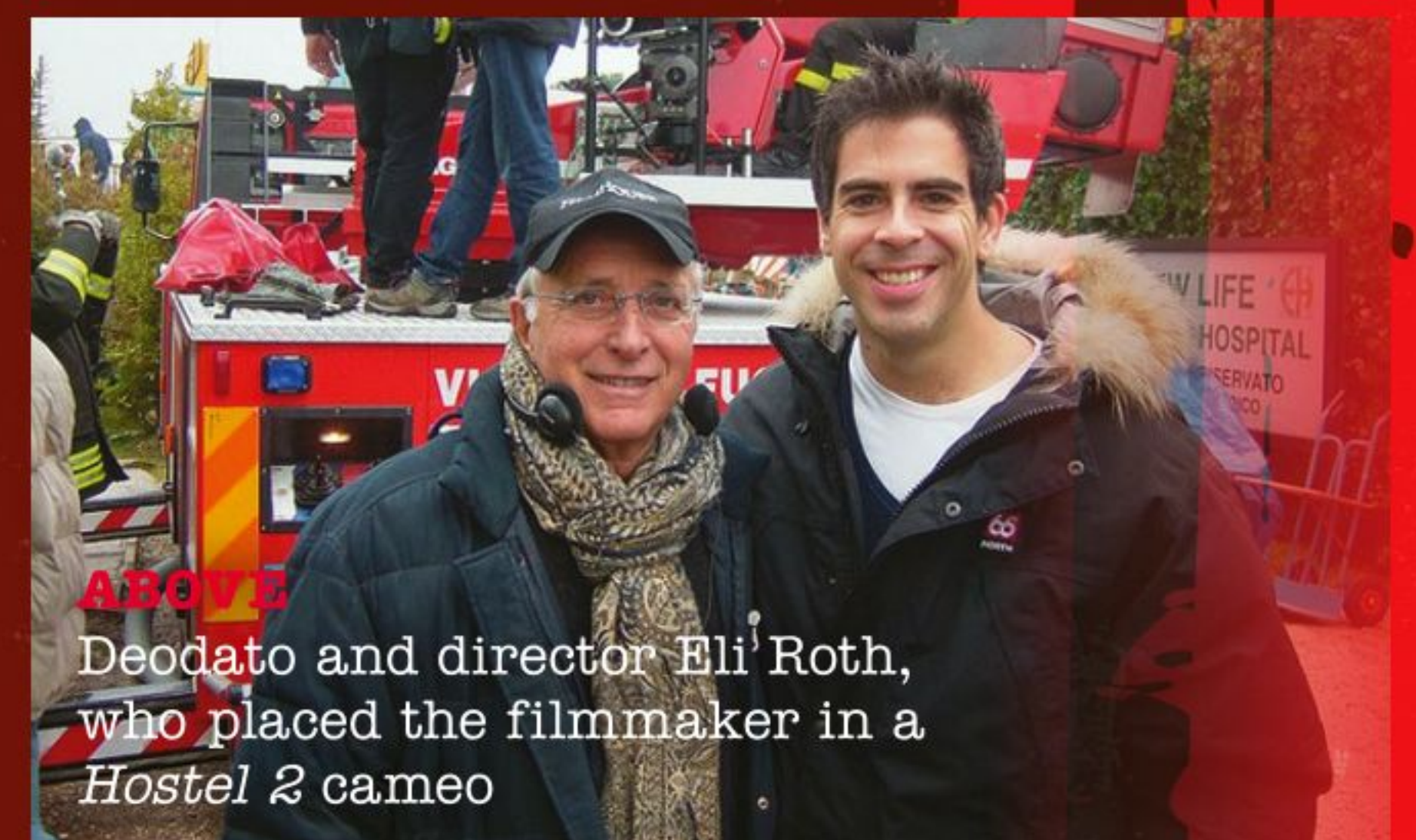
"Eli Roth, of course, went out and made his own cannibal movie – *The Green Inferno*," smiles the director. "I enjoyed it, but it is not like *Cannibal Holocaust* – it lacks the realism of my film. Today, everything is too close to civilisation, whereas we went out to a very dangerous part of the world where no one had ever filmed. We captured new locations, worked with local actors and a tiny crew, and we climbed trees with heavy equipment. Eli had a professional make-up crew, whereas we just used mud! *Cannibal Holocaust* was a one-of-a-kind experience – you cannot do something as original again."



To find out more, read *Cannibal Holocaust* by Calum Waddell, published in the Devil's Advocates series from Auteur.



ABOVE Francesca Ciardi's character meets a horrible and humiliating death



ABOVE Deodato and director Eli Roth, who placed the filmmaker in a *Hostel 2* cameo

Cannibal Holocaust Part II?

Will a sequel ever reach the rainforest? Probably not...

For years, rumours have spread that Deodato was set to return to horror infamy with a follow-up to his most famous fright-flick. Speaking today, the director admits that while he has investigated the possibility, it is unlikely to happen.

"A Canadian producer wanted me to do a sequel just a few years ago," he reveals. "It was going to be called *Cannibals*, and I went so far as to go location scouting in the Philippines... What we were going to show was the cannibals escaping from the rainforest and rampaging through the city – but it all fell apart in the end, because the producer could not raise the final budget we needed. To be honest, I really do not expect to be back in the jungle anytime soon!"



ABOVE The remains of the doomed film crew after they become cannibal lunch!

STRAIGHT ON TILL MORNING



Anglo-EMI Film Distributors Ltd. present
A HAMMER PRODUCTION

starring

Rita Tushingham in

"STRAIGHT ON TILL MORNING"

also starring

Shane Briant
James Bolam • Annie Ross
and **Tom Bell**

Screenplay by **JOHN PEACOCK** Produced by **MICHAEL CARRERAS** Directed by **PETER COLLINSON**

TECHNICOLOR*

Distributed by Anglo **EMI** Film Distributors Ltd.



Upon moving to London, the sheltered Brenda quickly encounters Peter.



Brenda doesn't realise her fate until it's way too late.



Shane Briant's Peter evokes the protagonists of *Maniac* and *Peeping Tom*.



Briant was a Hammer regular at the time of his casting.

STRAIGHT ON TILL MORNING

RELEASED
1972

WRITER

John Peacock

DIRECTOR

Peter Collinson

STARRING

Rita Tushingham,

Shane Briant,

James Bolam

WILL SALMON LOOKS BACK AT HAMMER'S FORGOTTEN CULT HIT

When you think of Hammer, chances are a set of stock images come to mind: Christopher Lee's *Dracula*; horse-drawn carriages; buxom wenches in taverns... but the studio's output was far more diverse than that, especially in the early Seventies, with films like *Fear In The Night*, *Twins Of Evil* and *Straight On Till Morning* – one of the studio's most atypical, most intriguing and little-seen – films.

Brenda (Rita Tushingham) is a shy young woman from Liverpool who wants a child more than anything. Fleeing her slightly-too-clingy mother in true 'She's Leaving Home' fashion, she moves to London (here presented as still being in full late Sixties/early Seventies swing – all parties, promiscuous sex and wild fashion) to find a man. She engineers a meeting with Peter (Shane Briant – a Hammer staple at the time), a young man with a mysterious past, who turns out to be far stranger than she anticipated. But as the two get to know each other, his eccentric behaviour begins to take on a more sinister hue.

Insulted for her mousy appearance by her 'friend' Caroline (Katya Wyeth) and radiating desperate loneliness, she finds herself repeatedly trampled on by other people. It's little wonder that when Peter makes her a proposition – move in with him, care for him, and he'll consider giving her a child – she jumps at the chance. Sure, he's a complete weirdo, but at least he's company – and with his long blonde hair, he's beautiful. In contrast to *The Likely Lads* star James Bolam's sleazy Joey, who she initially latches on to, he seems positively angelic.

Unfortunately, it's quickly made clear that Peter is a very sick boy indeed. He slaughters his own scruffy dog Tinkerbelle after Brenda (or Wendy, as he starts to call her in one of many allusions to JM Barrie's *Peter Pan*, from which the film takes its title) gives her a makeover. Turns out that the troubled Peter *hates* beauty, and takes it out on the women he meets. Brenda is safe, as she is considered 'plain' but the party girls around her are in trouble...

BEAUTY KILLS

Collinson's film is certainly far from pretty in any conventional sense. Beginning in the grey streets of Liverpool, it presents London of the early Seventies as a nocturnal brutalist warren. There's a starkness to the film's


sympathetic. Like Mark in *Peeping Tom*, to which this film undoubtedly owes a debt, it is implied that he has been warped by his parents. He is dismissive when Brenda (not Wendy) discusses her mother, stating that "they're all the same", and there's a suggestion that his own mother is either absent or dead – perhaps killed by him. Whatever the case may be, it has clearly warped his views, and you feel a certain amount of pity for the bizarre boy who never quite grew up.

Likewise, Brenda isn't exactly without issues. She tells her mother that she is already pregnant as a way to set herself free, but her pursuit of a father and child – *any* father and child borders on mania.

Tushingham is terrific throughout, her sincere and pained performance carrying a weight of tragedy with it, even if you do occasionally want to scream at her for her blind naivete.

Collinson went on to make a further nine films (plus the TV movie *The House On Garibaldi Street*) after *Straight On Till Morning*, including 1975's horror

mystery *The Spiral Staircase*. He passed away in 1980 at the tragically young age of 44 from lung cancer. 1969's *The Italian Job* remains his best known work.

Straight On Till Morning won't be for everyone. It's slow in places, and if you're in the mood for a straight-up horror film, this is probably not the film to pick. But horror it is, a doomy romance of sorts where an innocent wanders into a monster's lair and falls helplessly, dangerously in love. It's a unique entry into the Hammer canon, with a quiet, sad tone that's not scary as such, but remains uniquely haunting. 

You feel a certain amount of pity for the bizarre boy who never quite grew up

editing too, with plentiful use of voiceovers, flashbacks – and flashforwards – creating a disorientating sense of time and place. It nods towards the 'naive girl moves to swinging London' sub-genre that includes films like Lindsay Shonteff's *Permissive* and Gerry O'Hara's *That Kind Of Girl* (both reissued a few years ago on the BFI Flipside label), and has a certain kitchen-sink grit – no doubt aided by Tushingham's casting, best known as she was for Tony Richardson's 1961 drama, *A Taste Of Honey*.

The interesting thing is, for all his psychosis, Peter is – at least partially –

 **DID YOU KNOW...** KATYA WYETH APPEARED IN SEVERAL HAMMER FILMS, INCLUDING *HANDS OF THE RIPPER*, BUT IS BEST KNOWN FOR HER APPEARANCES ON *MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS*.

SPINAL HORROR

An American Werewolf In London's **David Naughton** was a 'one-hit wonder' in both the movies and as a musician, but he remains good-humoured about his brief time at the top, as Calum Waddell finds out...

David Naughton will forever be associated with his starring role in John Landis' 1981 comedy-horror trendsetter *An American Werewolf In London*. However, the fine thespian's career has taken in other interesting projects that fans may not be aware of. For instance, Naughton was actually a teen pop icon long before he started sprouting hair and walking on all fours.

Singing the theme song to the hit American comedy series *Makin' It*, Naughton had a platinum-selling single and appeared to be on the cusp of superstardom. Today, though, the classically trained actor remains a convention fixture – although his role in the Landis classic led to several subsequent independent genre parts (he can be seen in the sequel *Amityville: A New Generation*, from 1992, and the anthology film *Body Bags*, from 1993).

Before you became known for appearing in *An American Werewolf In London*, you had your first success with music. Was this never something you wanted to pursue further?

Well, when I first became famous in the United States, it was really through the soft drink Dr Pepper. I was in these national commercials, they were little musical spots, and from being in those I moved to Los Angeles and got cast in *Makin' It*. We did 13 episodes, and I remember meeting with the

executives at Paramount and asking about singing the title song. This was 1979, and they had Frankie Valli and some other people in mind, but I talked my way into the studio, and I convinced them that the star of the show should also do the theme track. They finally agreed, and it was used to promote the series, and it went to hit number five in the Billboard Top 40.

But you became a 'one-hit wonder' – why was this?

It's weird, I had this one song in the charts, but the RSO label, and Rob Stigwood [the President] were only concerned with The Bee Gees at the time. That was their main group. They were asking, "So what's happening with the Bee Gees? Are they going to break up?" Everyone else was kind of pushed to the side. In the late Seventies they had this other little known guy called Eric Clapton hanging around as well [laughs]. I had one of their highest-rating songs, and they just





shrugged and asked, “So who is this David Naughton?” Well, I was an actor – so they just saw the song as a fluke. In the end they just didn’t write a follow-up song for me.

So how did you come to be involved with *An American Werewolf In London*?

The Dr Pepper commercial was very popular at the time. As it happens, John Landis was an avid Dr Pepper drinker, so he knew who I was. It was a curious coincidence and opportunity, because back then this was the guy – he was the whole deal, he wrote the script, he was casting it, he had total freedom. This was not like my television experience, where there were so many people involved. John had the final say.

I met with him, it was a very social occasion, and we got along well. He told me about this amazing make-up guy he knew called Rick Baker, who had worked with him on his first film *Schlock*, and he said, “Whoever plays this part is going to be working with Rick a lot.” I told him I’d lived in London, and travelled all around Great Britain. He said, “The character’s backpacking, have you done that?” I said, “Oh, sure” – that’s what every actor says to get the part – “You’re going to wake up naked in a zoo, you ever done that?” And you say, “Oh, sure” [laughs]. You just assume you’ll pick everything up as the film goes along – it’s usually a personality test to see if you fit the profile of the character.

John was not particularly big on having stars in the film, although there were well-known people who wanted to be involved in ‘the next John Landis film’. *An American Werewolf In London* had been his pet project for years, and he said to me at the interview, “Call me tomorrow.” I remember thinking, “That’s unorthodox,” because usually you have to go through agents, do a screen test and meet executives... John and I were of the same generation and of the same age, primarily. So the next day I called him and he said, “So, do you want to be a werewolf?” I said, “Well, what does that entail?” and he told me I’d have to go and meet Rick. This was October and they started filming in January.

How did you react to the script – I think it calls for you to be naked three times. Was this ever a problem for you?

You read it in the script, and it’s like, only an eighth of a page [laughs]. You read something like, “He turns into a wolf,” you go, “Well, okay,” and then, “They make love passionately” – there’s not much more detail. “He wakes up naked in the zoo” – it’s only when you get on set that you realise – “As in naked? With real wolves?” You get told, “Oh yeah, there will be real wolves, and it will be zero degrees out there” [laughs]. I remember going to meet Rick, and he said to me, “So, you’re playing what part?” and I told him I was the lead. He says, “Oh, I feel so sorry for you”, which wasn’t really the reaction I was expecting [laughs].

Did you ever encounter any, let’s say, less-than-friendly pubs, like the film’s famous *The Slaughtered Lamb*, when you were studying in London?

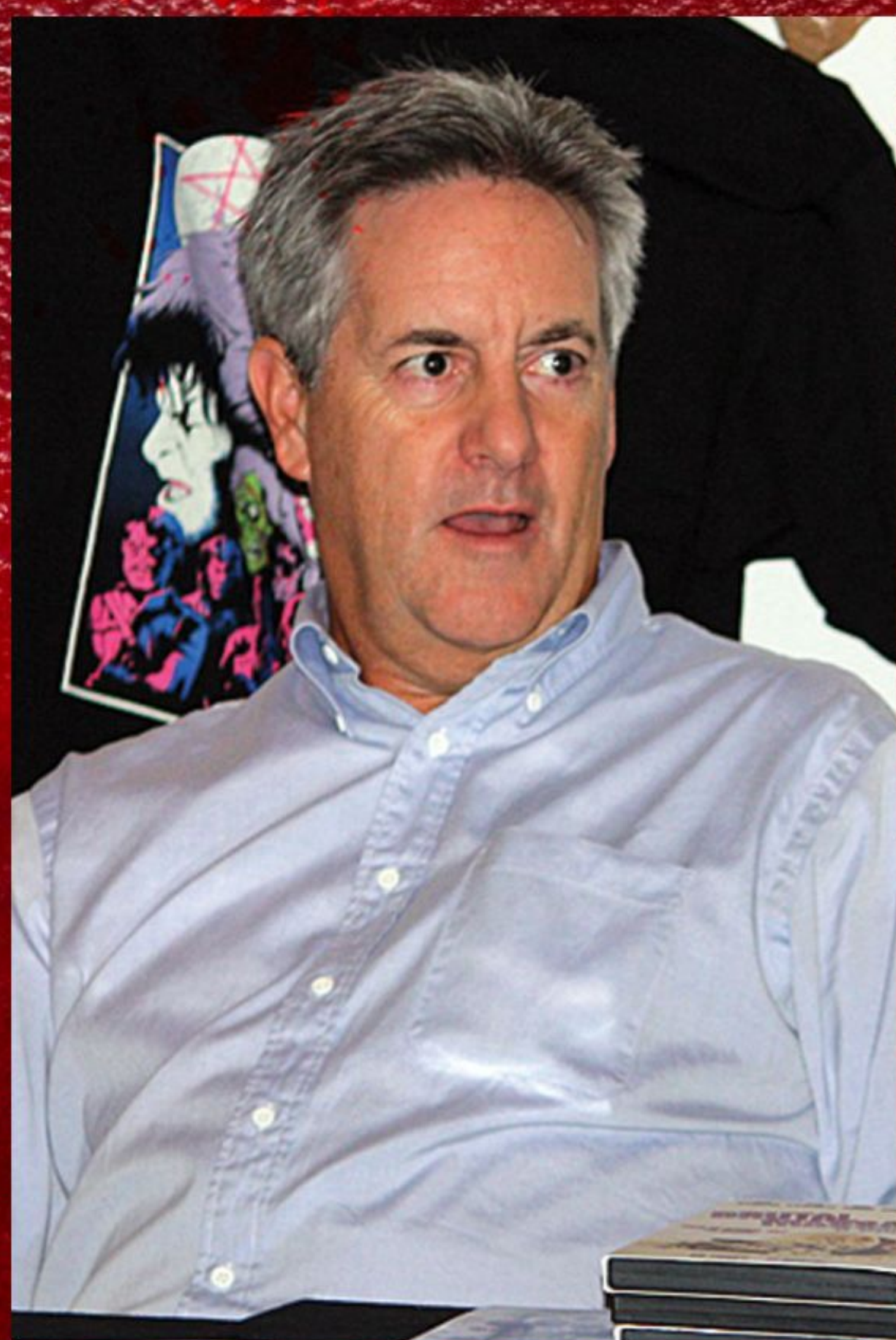
I don’t know about that, but I’ve certainly felt what it’s like to be an outsider there. The pub scene is clearly more local in the city, and being an American I noticed that was just the way it was in London, at least with certain bars. You know, some of them only really cater to the local people. But yeah, I remember some weird looks from locals – and them playing chess and darts – ignoring this loud American [laughs].

How on earth did you get away with shooting the scene in Trafalgar Square where you call Prince Charles ‘a faggot’ and Queen Elizabeth ‘a man’? Did you have to close Trafalgar Square off to do this?

No, it was shot right there, on the spot. I was quite embarrassed by it and, in fact, you can see that – it was done with a lot of energy, with me spinning away from the camera shouting, “Queen Elizabeth is a man.” I thought they might want to dub all that, which is why I spun away from the camera. “Surely they won’t use that?” Yeah, it was uncomfortable... you know, it’s bizarre, because I remember the first thing that John shot was the porn film that plays in the adult cinema when I’m hiding in there and start to change into the werewolf. I was reading the script, and asked him, “All this porn stuff, you don’t actually see any of that?” and he said, ‘Oh yeah, we shot that already – people even turned up to audition for it.’

Did you ever hear much about the sequel that John Landis had always hoped to make?

Not really. There was talk – and there was a tentative deal. They signed us for a sequel in the initial contract. I was talking to John, and I said, “If there is a sequel and Jenny is running down the alleyway, is there a chance I might live at the end and be in the next one?” And John just said, “No you die, cut to the music.”



Images © Michael Koschinski

And that sudden ending still upsets some viewers and fans...

I know. Boom! Dead! Movie over! Get out! That's just the way it goes [laughs]...

Have you ever seen Anthony Waller's 1997 follow-up, *An American Werewolf In Paris*?

I did see it. I was really upset that they would call it a sequel. I always thought sequels had something to do with the original! It's not a sequel as such, and it didn't do well, it had a CGI creature. It was quite different, and I was happy not to be involved.

When you returned to horror, it was with 1990's *The Sleeping Car*, which homages to *An American Werewolf* with its dream-within-a-dream sequence. Was this added for you?

I think it was already there, but lots of films borrowed that idea from John's movie. So hey, why not? It's a great idea, right?

Did you enjoy working with another legendary genre filmmaker, John Carpenter, on his anthology film *Body Bags* in 1993?

Oh that was good. There's something pretty special about what he lets you do, and he appeared in *Body Bags* too. John tends to hire actors, and then you don't hear much more from him. He uses his personal choices to create the characters. He'll say, "This is how I see you in the film, and this is the type of character you'll play." He was a very different sort of filmmaker from Landis.

An American Werewolf In London is available to buy on Blu-ray now, distributed by Universal.



TOP

On getting the part, Naughton had to meet with special effects and make-up designer Rick Baker months before filming began

MIDDLE

The script called for Naughton to be naked no less than three times

BOTTOM

Instead of CGI, the iconic film relied on physical make-up effects



One of David Lynch's most critically maligned films is also one of his best, says **Will Salmon**



IN DEFENCE OF... **TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME** (1992)

Twin Peaks is famous for a lot of things: cherry pie, coffee “as black as midnight on a moonless night”, Audrey Horne tying cherry stems with her tongue, those red curtains... They help conjure an image of the show that’s both seductive and cosy, sexy and quaint.

Fire Walk With Me – David Lynch’s 1992 prequel/sequel to his then freshly cancelled show – has almost none of these things. Where *Twin Peaks* the show is charming and sweet with a dark undercurrent, *Fire Walk With Me* is bleak, brutal and absolutely terrifying. It even opens with a shot of a TV screen being smashed to pieces. Subtle, Dave.

That’s probably why the film failed commercially, and why it’s taken decades for many fans to come around to it – if they have at all. Dedicated to the final week of Laura Palmer’s (Sheryl Lee) life, it mostly eschews Agent Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) and the TV’s show’s beloved

cast, honing instead on Laura, her family (most notably Ray Wise as her father Leland, and Grace Zabriskie as her mother Sarah) and friends.

In making this decision it foregrounds a fundamental truth of *Twin Peaks* that’s often ignored – at its heart, *Twin Peaks* is about the horrifying murder of a young woman. A plot device in the show, here we discover exactly who Laura was: a complicated, troubled and troubling, but also deeply sympathetic woman who endures a trauma that takes her the entirety of the film to fully understand – although tragically too late.

As ever, Lynch makes few concessions to expectations or conventional narrative. *Fire Walk With Me* spends its opening act in the town of Deer Meadow – a curdled parody of Twin Peaks with none of its charm. And instead of following Coop, we’re introduced to two FBI agents, Chester Desmond (Chris Isaak) and Sam Stanley (Kiefer Sutherland), who then remain off-stage for the rest of the film. Further mystery comes in

the form of David Bowie’s Agent Phillip Jeffries, who appears after a period of being missing, babbles incomprehensibly, and then vanishes again without explanation. When we finally do get to Twin Peaks itself, it’s a much harsher environment – the show’s motifs of prostitution, drugs, self destruction and sexual abuse made clear. It’s perhaps no wonder that fans hoping for more jokes and cryptic Log Lady messages were left cold.

But if you’ve only seen it once, or not at all, then we urge you to give it a try. *Fire Walk With Me* feels like the next natural step for the series. It has brilliant performances from the cast – Lee, of course, but also Wise’s deeply troubled Leland. And Angelo Badalamenti’s score, recently reissued on vinyl, is one of the truly great movie soundtracks. Both a striking prequel and a bold conclusion to the story, it will be fascinating to see how it impacts on Season Three...

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“A modern horror classic – by turns chilling, horrifying and utterly unforgettable”

“More often than not it jars;
proving too silly to be serious and
too bleak to be funny”



THE BELKO EXPERIMENT

The Redundancy Games

There is an absurdity to office life; specifically the colleague, who lives in the limbo between stranger and friend. Comedy has long found material in such absurdity, in the forced camaraderie of corporate culture. But horror has too; usually placing a group of awkward co-workers at the mercy of a killer, or as is the case in *The Belko Experiment*, forcing them to kill each other — the rat racers becoming guinea pigs in a deadly social experiment.

DETAILS

DIRECTOR

Greg McLean

WRITER

James Gunn

STARRING

John Gallagher Jr., Tony Goldwyn, Adria Arjona, John C McGinley, Melonie Diaz

CERTIFICATE

18

DISTRIBUTOR

Orion Pictures

OUT

Out now

The test subjects? Employees of Belko, an American corporation whose loosely defined purpose is to help international companies place US workers. Not today, though. Today, at its Colombian branch in Bogotá, its purpose is to lock the building down and inform its staff, over intercom, that unless 30 of them are dead within the next two hours, 60 will die — via explosives, disguised as anti-kidnap trackers, hidden in their skulls. Cue confusion — then chaos.

It's a similar idea, of course, to Kinji Fukasaku's *Battle Royale*. Although tonally, the execution is quite different. *Battle Royale* was, for all its notoriety, a teen drama — a cartoon whose kills were mostly executed in cutaway shots. *The Belko Experiment*, however, is rooted in juxtaposition: satire vs gravitas, corporate banality vs surreal ultraviolence. Occasionally it works, but more often than not it jars, proving too silly to be serious and too bleak to be funny.

A good example comes early on. The workforce, naturally, splits into factions. The 'good guys' are led by a

fairly blank employee called Mike (John Gallagher Jr), who seek escape rather than murder. The 'bad guys' are led by Mike's aggressive boss (Tony Goldwyn), who directs his band of realists (who include, among others, John C McGinley) to take Darwinism to its extremes.

This leads to one particularly harrowing sequence in which the realists, having now found guns, put the employees through a selection process; deciding who will live (anyone with children under 18, for instance) and who will die (anyone over 60). Sobbing, people plead for their lives. Some vomit out of fear. They're forced to kneel down, hands behind their heads, and one by one they're executed. It's shocking and horrible, all to the soundtrack of a wacky Latin cover of 'California Dreamin' by the Mamas and the Papas. These people dying is funny, you see. This is comedy.

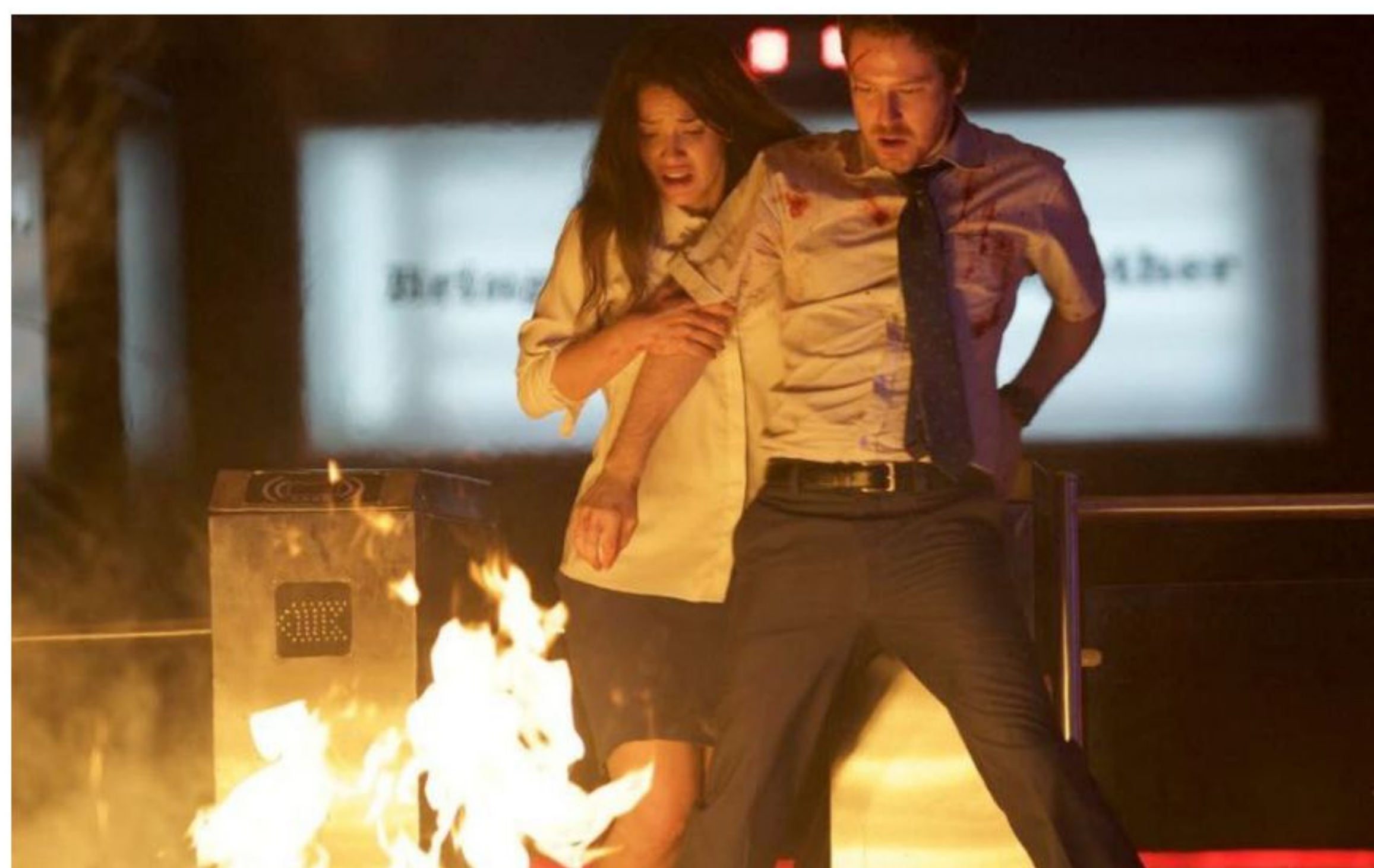
But *The Belko Experiment*'s main problem isn't tone. It's that it takes the familiar idea of kill-or-be-killed and does nothing novel with it. The film, directed by Greg McLean (*Wolf Creek*), is said to be inspired by a dream of screenwriter James Gunn, best known for *Guardians Of The Galaxy*. But what was this dream? To pose weighty questions of morality, but possess none of the maturity required to explore them? To say nothing more about modern office life than *Office Space* said two decades ago? Or simply to make a gory, throwaway horror in which heads explode and a man gets beaten to death with a Sellotape holder? Either way, it's a nightmare.

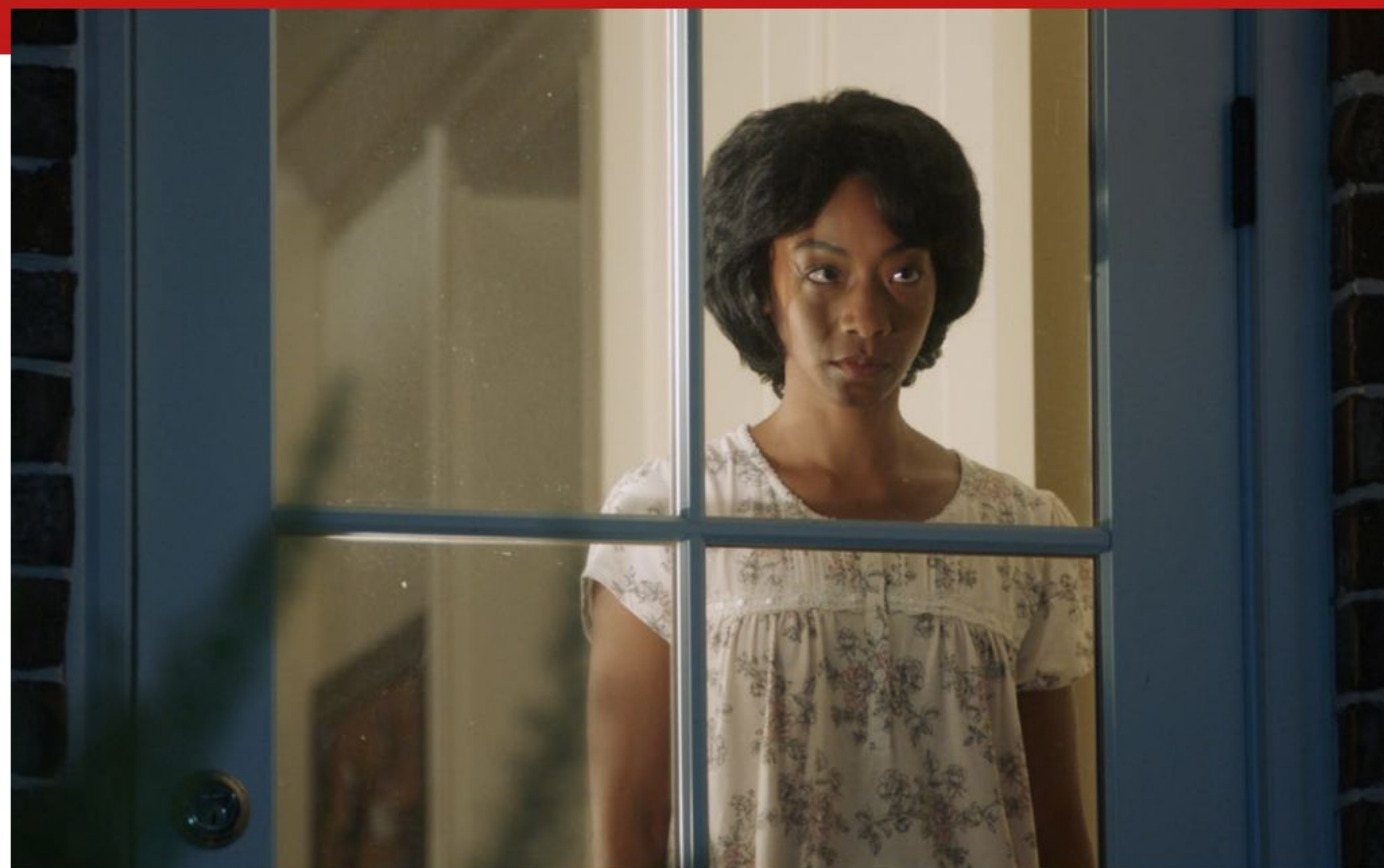
STEPHEN KELLY

HORRORVILLE SAYS:

Too silly to be serious, too bleak to be funny, *The Belko Experiment* is a strange, jarring horror

RATING ★★☆☆☆





GET OUT

Meet the parents

Some films seem to be released with such appropriate timing that you have to wonder whether it was all planned. With *Get Out*, it was, but its sudden relevance would likely have taken even director/writer Jordan Peele by surprise.

Originally intended as a dark send-up of racial complacency in the Obama era, the events of *Get Out* take on a different meaning in light of the current occupant of the White House and the upwards swing in far-right nationalism. But while this backdrop is impossible to ignore, it's equally important to emphasise that the film's excellence in no way hinges on it.

Right from its opening scene depicting a black man being abducted in a Stepford Wives-esque white-picket suburbia, it is clear viewer expectations will be challenged. The first act, in which photographer Chris (Daniel Kaluuya) is taken by his

girlfriend Rose (Allison Williams) to visit her parents, is awkward enough to throw you off guard – particularly Bradley Whitford as the eager-to-please dad, effusive in his praise of Barack Obama and practically apologetic that his two staff members happen to be black.

The more we see of the neighbourhood, the stranger it gets. What starts as a light-hearted take on 1967 Sidney Poitier-starrer *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner* takes the kind of detour that could be insufficiently described as 'sinister'. You'll have your suspicions, but we'll be surprised if you're 100 per cent accurate.

Credit for this runaway hit is due in a number of directions, foremost to Peele himself. Anyone who has seen his comedy sketch show *Key & Peele* will be aware of his penchant for puncturing conventional views on race relations with plenty of laughs, and while the comedy factor is dialled down here (with the exception of Lil Rel Howery, who as Chris's best friend Rod frequently threatens to run away with the film entirely, particularly during one hilarious phone exchange), his direction and writing is no less assured. We can't wait to see what he does next.

DETAILS

DIRECTOR
Jordan Peele

WRITER
Jordan Peele

STARRING
Daniel Kaluuya,
Allison Williams,
Bradley Whitford,
Catherine Keener,
Caleb Landry
Jones

CERTIFICATE
15

DISTRIBUTOR
Universal

OUT
Out now

Then there's Kaluuya. So often the decent support to the Hollywood lead via the likes of *Sicario* and *Kick-Ass 2*, and supporting characters in TV's *Psychoville* and *Black Mirror* (hell, he's even a background character in his breakout, *Skins*), he's assured and empathetic at every turn in his first major lead role, utterly relatable as a guy fully expecting a terrible time yet going along for the ride anyway. Williams is similarly effective (those familiar with her from *Girls* will find it impossible not to think of Marnie), and Whitford and Catherine Keener convincing as the family unit.

Get Out is being heralded as the pioneer of a new age in horror social commentary – and if it leads to more films of this quality, then we can only hope it's true. Whether or not Peele continues to create films for the genre, he has provided it with one of its best films of the 21st century. **STEVE WRIGHT**

HORRORVILLE SAYS:

A modern horror classic – by turns chilling, horrifying and utterly unforgettable. Watch it..

RATING ★★★★★



RINGS

Just turn the telly off

In the 12 years since soggy dead girl Samara last climbed out of her well and through someone's TV in *The Ring Two*, technology has changed, so you'd expect her to have upgraded her bag of tricks. And at the start of *Rings*, it seems like it might be true.

Instead of hoping someone will find a VCR to watch her dusty old tape on, Samara (Bonnie Morgan) has gone digital. A university professor (Johnny Galecki) has developed a workaround for her seven-day rule: he's got students watching digital copies of the cursed tape before passing them on to someone else in an elaborate buddy system that should keep everyone safe. But then one of his subjects drops out, someone's girlfriend watches the tape, and the experiment is abandoned. The rest plays out like a dull

DETAILS

DIRECTOR

F Javier Gutiérrez

WRITERS

David Loucka, Jacob Estes, Akiva Goldsman

CAST

Matilda Lutz, Alex Roe, Johnny Galecki, Vincent D'Onofrio, Bonnie Morgan

CERT

15

DISTRIBUTOR

Paramount

RELEASED

Out now

copy of the original movie, with all the idiotic contrivances you'd expect in a third-generation J-horror knock-off.

As soon as the teens start researching who Samara's real mum was, you might as well stop watching. There's not a single new idea after that, and no real scares, either. The opening scenes hint that there might at least be some

innovative set pieces, but nope – just the standard hairballs and bug infestations. You might not be dead seven days after watching this tedious cash-in, but you won't remember much about it either. **SARAH DOBBS**

HORRORVILLE SAYS:

First you watch it, then you die... but boredom will get you long before Samara does.

RATING

A CURE FOR WELLNESS

Take the cure!

A *Cure For Wellness* is exactly the type of offbeat project only a Hollywood director who has made billions at the box office can get green-lit.

While the actually-not-that-bad *The Lone Ranger* was exactly the kind of ultra-expensive flop that could have killed the career of a lesser-known filmmaker stone dead, director Gore Verbinski has enough industry clout and good will in the bank to make a valiantly non-commercial, phantasmagoric Gothic horror primed with Magritte-like surrealism, fairy-tale motifs and archetypal figures. You can't accuse him of playing it safe or licking his wounds in retreat.

Sent to retrieve his convalescing boss from an exclusive health spa in the Swiss Alps, young Lockhart (Dane DeHaan) finds the place a touch creepy and the staff frustrating his every turn.

DETAILS

DIRECTOR

Gore Verbinski

WRITERS

Justin Haythe, Gore Verbinski

CAST

Dane DeHaan, Mia Goth, Jason Isaacs

CERT

18

DISTRIBUTOR

20th Century Fox

RELEASED

Out now

Something isn't right about the wellness centre – he just can't put his finger on it. Having failed to convince the CEO (Harry Groener) that he's needed back in New York, Lockhart breaks a leg in a car accident and is unable to leave town. The slightly obnoxious American is slowly drawn into a wickedly perverse mystery

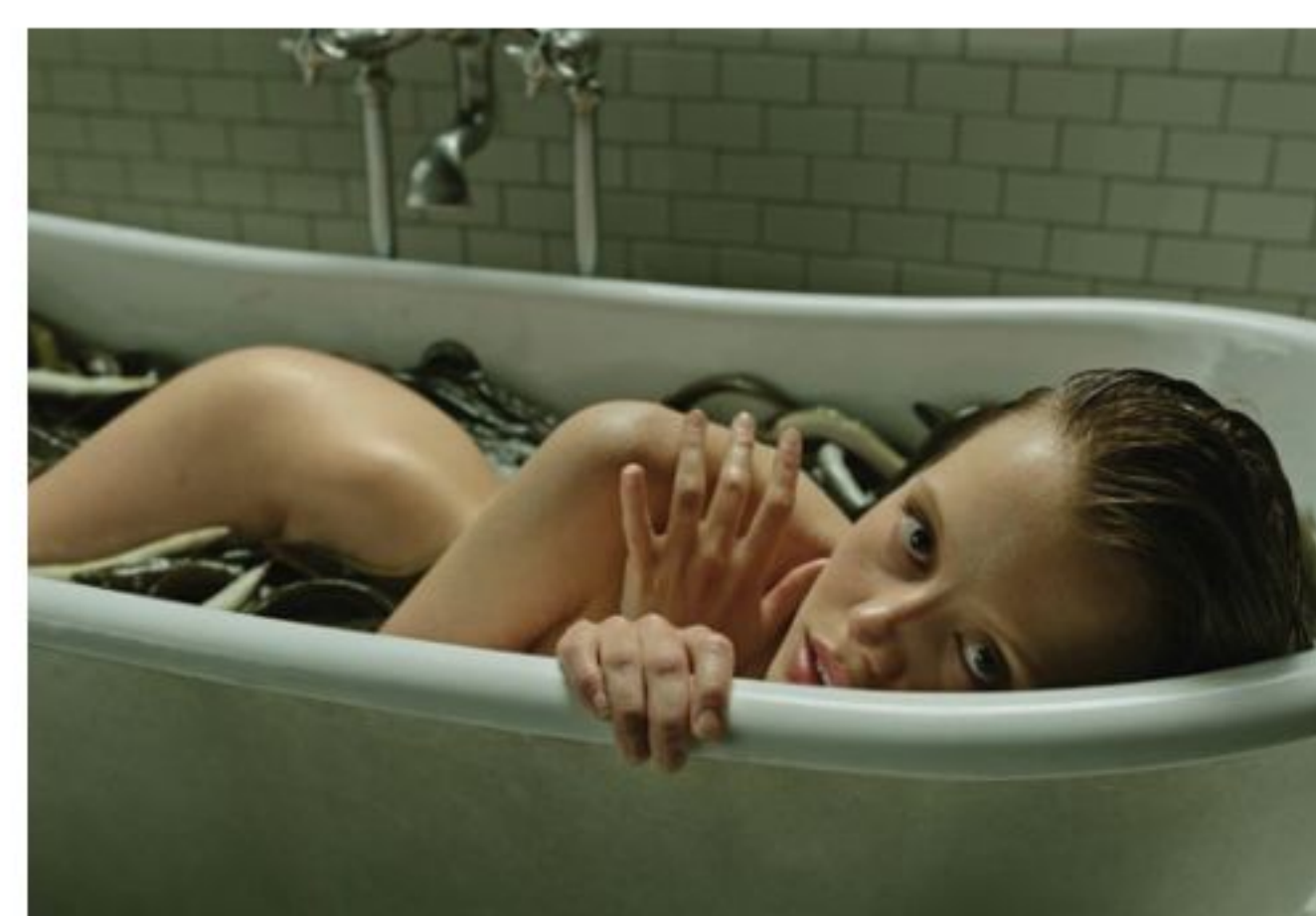
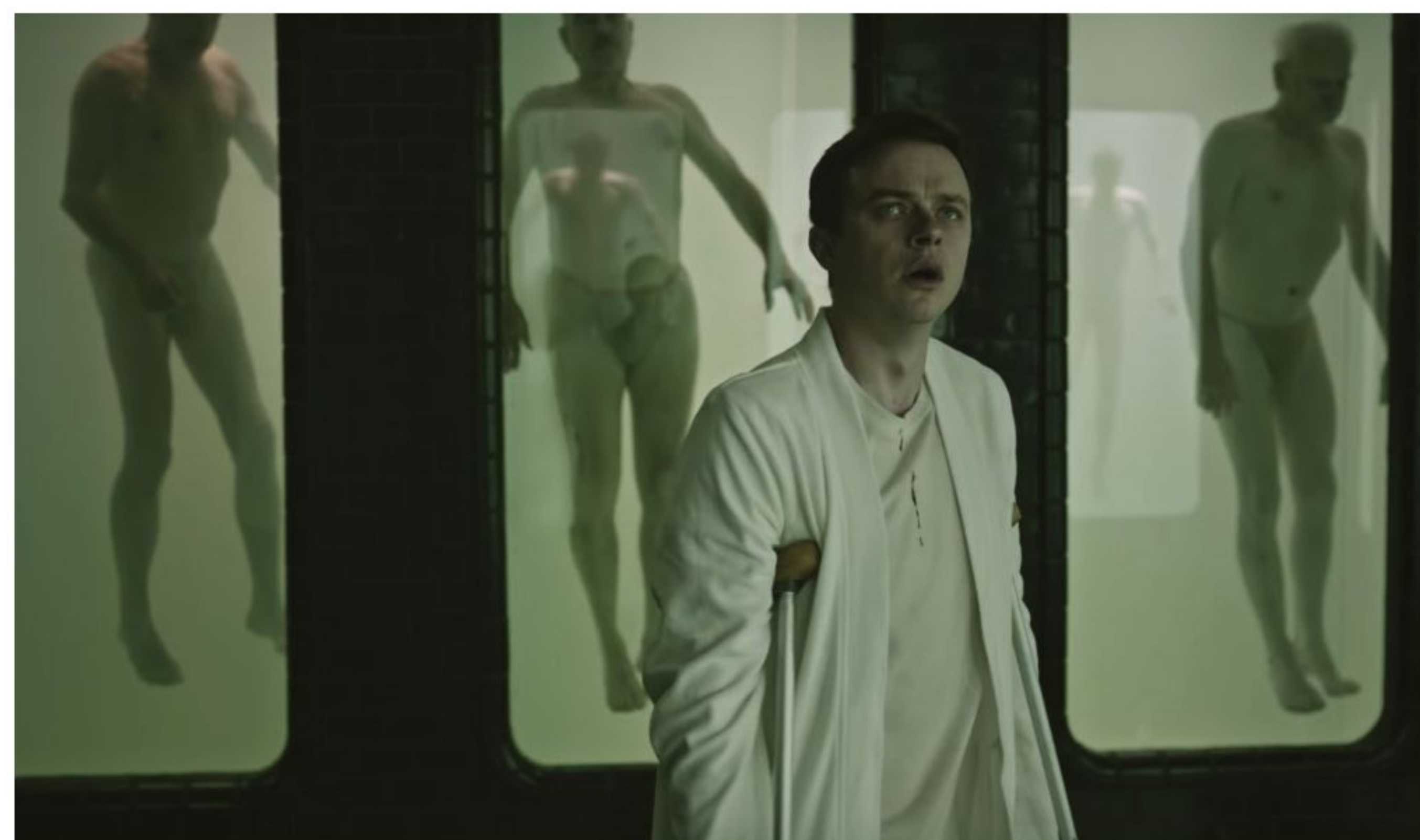
involving mad scientists, a damsel in distress and the clueless millionaire clientele.

Clocking in at an arse-numbing two and a half hours (though it's never dull), *A Cure For Wellness* delivers the goods with an epic tale of love, death and yearning for immortality. **MARTYN CONTERIO**

HORRORVILLE SAYS:

Fans of Gothic literature and horror productions will find much to enjoy.

RATING





LIFE

Impatient for Alien: Covenant? Choose Life

So, it's like *Alien*, but with a gloopy, blood-sucking and surprisingly nimble starfish?" That's almost certainly how the pitch meeting went for this entertaining, if decidedly derivative sci-fi thriller that sees a group of six international astronauts (including Jake Gyllenhaal, Ryan Reynolds and Rebecca Ferguson) trapped aboard a space station with a ravenous and rapidly evolving alien life-form.

Director Daniel Espinosa (*Easy Money*) maintains a cracking pace throughout, generating clammy tension as the sneaky critter quickly learns important survival tricks like hiding, pouncing and stripping the flesh from its victims. To that end, the gore effects are nicely handled, particularly during the creature's genuinely terrifying first attack, when one of the ship's scientists learns, too late, that alien life-forms don't really like being probed.

DETAILS
DIRECTOR Daniel Espinosa
WRITERS Rhett Reese, Paul Wernick
CAST Jake Gyllenhaal, Ryan Reynolds, Rebecca Ferguson, Olga Dihovichnaya, Hiroyuki Sanada, Ariyon Bakare
CERT 15
DISTRIBUTOR Sony
RELEASED Out now

However, the direction occasionally stumbles, most notably in a confusingly staged and poorly edited scene towards the end where it's difficult to tell what's going on. Similarly, the pacing is off during the finale, which robs the closing sequence of its intended impact.

Fortunately, the actors are all on good form, with Reynolds getting in some good one-liners (courtesy of

Deadpool scripters Reese and Wernick) and Gyllenhaal bringing some unexpected pathos as a man who's tired of life on Earth and doesn't want to go back. The writers also have fun with the standard pecking order, so you're constantly kept guessing as to who's next on the menu.

MATTHEW TURNER

HORRORVILLE SAYS:

What this slick *Alien* clone lacks in originality, it makes up for in clammy terror.

RATING ★★★★★



A DARK SONG

Blood sugar, sex, magic

This gripping two-hander marks an impressive debut for Irish/Welsh writer-director Liam Gavin. Catherine Walker plays Sophia, a grief-stricken young woman who's crippled by guilt over the recent death of her young daughter in horrific circumstances.

In a state of desperation, she reaches out to Solomon (*Sightseers*' Steve Oram), a troubled occultist who claims to be able to perform an ancient invocation ritual that will allow both participants to achieve whatever they desire, which in Sophia's case means making contact with her deceased child. Having locked themselves away in a remote country house in North Wales, the pair begin the arduous and potentially dangerous preparation process for the complex ritual.

Gavin's clever script works on two very effective levels, mining clammy tension from the setup of two damaged people forced to live together in an enclosed space, while expertly

DETAILS
DIRECTOR Liam Gavin
WRITER Liam Gavin
CAST Steve Oram, Catherine Walker
CERT 15
DISTRIBUTOR Kaleidoscope Entertainment
RELEASED Out now

building a sense of anticipation and dread as the ritual progresses over a period of months.

Essentially a two-hander, the film is elevated by a pair of terrific central performances from the two: Walker is heartbreaking as a woman who is tormented by her own demons even before the occult gets involved, and

Oram brings a dark undercurrent to his Brummie-accented practitioner of the dark arts that generates further suspense by casting doubt on both his motives and his abilities.

Ultimately, it's fair to say that the ending feels a little anti-climactic, but when the journey is both as intense and original as this, this doesn't prove to be as much of a problem as it could have been. MATTHEW TURNER

HORRORVILLE SAYS:

An atmospheric and suspenseful chiller that marks Gavin as one to watch.

RATING ★★★★★



RAW

Something to chew on

As college hazing rituals go, forcing pledges to swallow chunks of unidentifiable animal flesh is pretty extreme. But that's exactly what happens to poor old Justine (Garance Marillier) in this French-Belgian shocker, and it serves as an initiation in more ways than one.

Before university, Justine was both a vegetarian and a virgin. Within weeks of enrolling at veterinary college, though, she starts both eating meat and having sex, in the process discovering a deep hunger within herself that can't easily be sated. And when Justine attempts to confide in her older sister Alexia (Ella Rumpf), she only manages to make things even more complicated.

You'll probably have heard about *Raw*'s reputation for being extremely upsetting, thanks to a screening at the Toronto International Film Festival that saw more than one audience member receiving emergency medical

care afterwards. And yes, it's true that there is some pretty spectacular gore in *Raw*. But if you're reading *Horrorville*, you've probably seen far more extreme films than this in your time, so don't go in expecting the next *Hostel* or *Audition*.

Instead, expect a furious (and occasionally hilarious) depiction of what it feels like to be a teenage girl in a world that's constantly trying to stamp on your desires and force you into becoming a smaller, meeker, more polite version of yourself. Though Justine's flesh-eating is her most controversial habit, her voracious sexual appetite is also a problem, a shameful bodily function that everyone would really rather she kept hidden.

Even her appetite for, you know, food, is constantly under scrutiny, as first her parents and then her fellow students seek to dictate what she can and can't eat. (The scene in which a doctor tells an apparently off-hand story about once having to treat a fat woman like any other patient is a particularly well-observed moment – and all the creepier for it.)

Using body horror to convey just how disturbing adolescence can be is hardly original, and it's not hard to spot parallels between *Raw* and other

DETAILS

DIRECTOR

Julia Ducournau

WRITER

Julia Ducournau

STARRING

Garance Marillier, Ella Rumpf, Rabah Nait Outfella, Laurent Lucas, Joanna Preiss

CERTIFICATE

18

DISTRIBUTOR

Universal

OUT

Out now

girl-centric horror films like *Ginger Snaps* or *Jennifer's Body*. What's striking about *Raw*, though, is how aggressive it is in its confrontation of various female anxieties, and how woozily visceral director Julia Ducournau manages to make Justine's predicament feel.

Through her camera, college parties become both dangerous and urgently sensual; the threat of violence is everywhere, even before Justine's feral side properly emerges, and her whole world feels barbed. Credit, too, is due to Garance Marillier, who ensures that even if you don't always like Justine, you always know where she's coming from. There's an inherent silliness to *Raw*'s premise, and the final scene's punchline really doesn't help. But though it might be tempting to laugh at its excesses, it's impossible to deny that Ducournau's film has a point. And once it's sunk its teeth into you, it won't let go without a fight.

SARAH DOBBS

HORRORVILLE SAYS:

A smart and striking debut that's equally unafraid of feminism and visceral body horror.

RATING ★★★★★



OUTCAST

Dead rising

Onto Season Two, and it's hard to put our finger on exactly what it is that's *Outcast's* hook. At its core a tale of demonic possession, the first season showed the haunted Kyle (Patrick Fugit) attempting to slowly rebuild his ruined life.

When we begin Season Two, the state of affairs is as close to being the polar opposite as it possibly could be: while he has somewhat come to terms with his power and the conflict he'll always face because of it, near enough everyone else in his immediate vicinity has been swamped by the hellish aftershocks that surround him.

Reverend Anderson (Philip Glenister) is on the verge of losing his faith in light of his disastrous actions in the Season One finale; Kyle's sister Megan (Wrenn Schmidt) is suicidal after the demon-induced murder of her husband, and the rest of the town appears to be in somewhat of a daze, all the while the mysterious Sidney (Brent Spiner) slithers nefariously along in the

DETAILS
SHOWRUNNER
 Robert Kirkman
STARRING
 Patrick Fugit,
 Philip Glenister,
 Wrenn Schmidt,
 Reg E Cathey,
 Brent Spiner,
 Madeline McGraw

background, his ultimate end game remaining unclear, even though he's transparently up to no good whatsoever. He just has that kind of look in his eye.

Pre-air date, all the talk was of the stakes being much higher this year, and you certainly get that feeling in the opening three episodes. While Sidney's gambit remains a secret, there is clearly something bigger afoot than the claustrophobic family drama that characterised the first season. It doesn't exactly move far beyond the homespun horror that characterised Season One, but it has certainly evolved.

Oddly, the demonic action seems to be a bit more low-key this season, but when you consider how tormented the characters are, they almost seem peripheral. Throw a spooky kid into the mix, and you have what has to be the most chilling show on TV this year.

So a solid start, in other words. Hopefully it'll last the pace. *STEVE WRIGHT*

RATING 



THE WALKING DEAD

Let the battle commence

So *The Walking Dead* is at an end for another year – but does enough happen in the second half of Season Seven to make you want to keep watching? For us, the jury is still out.

Sure, there are the episodes that deliver – 'Hostilities and Calamities' gives Eugene (Josh McDermitt) the fleshing-out that he so badly needs in light of his increased importance, in one fell swoop making him one of the show's most intriguing characters; 'Bury Me Here' delivers the kind of shocks that the show used to have as its trademark, and finale 'The First Day Of The Rest Of Your Life' does what it hasn't done since about Season Four: finish the year with an actual proper conclusion.

Unfortunately, the show's worst excesses remain. After the epic group hug of the mid-season finale, episode nine 'Rock in the Road' stalls progress once more, and then there are nothing episodes like 'Say Yes' and 'The Other Side', in which either very little happens, characterisation

DETAILS
SHOWRUNNER
 Scott M Gimple
STARRING
 Andrew Lincoln,
 Jeffrey Dean
 Morgan, Danai
 Gurira, Norman
 Reedus, Melissa
 McBride

stutters, or other missteps occur. (That CGI deer again. It really was incredibly shit.) Jeffrey Dean Morgan's Negan remains the show's biggest asset: an unpredictable bundle of smug satisfaction and

hair-trigger violence, he nonetheless poses the show's biggest conundrum: where exactly do they go with him? In the past *The Walking Dead* has mistakenly killed off its best villains too early, and we're sure that won't happen again, but they need to work this out fast. Likewise, there's Ezekiel (Khary Payton). For all the buzz that greeted his arrival, what has he actually done?

Realistically, if you're still watching *The Walking Dead* at this point, then you'll likely continue to do so until it's all over – we doubt we have the power to persuade you otherwise, even if we wanted to. Regardless, we can't imagine even its most ardent fans would dispute that we're long past the point of the show being what it once was. *STEVE WRIGHT*

RATING 



DIRECTOR Anders Jacobsson **WRITERS** Anders Jacobsson, Göran Lundström **CAST** Johan Rudebeck, Per Löfberg, Olof Rhodin
DISTRIBUTOR Arrow **FORMAT** Blu-ray, DVD **RELEASED** 27 May

EVIL ED

Fright said Ed

Editor Ed wasn't always bad. Starting out with all the unassuming charm of a man who nibbles gently on muesli, it's just watching hours of grim viscera and exploitative tat is enough to make a man... well, you've seen the title.

Finding himself positioned within the studio's 'Splatter & Gore' department, Ed (Johan Rudebeck) is tasked with trimming down the fictional 'Loose Limbs' films. A gore-soaked slasher franchise of increasingly lurid and explicit executions, it's basically the *Saw* series before the *Saw* series even existed. It's not long before all the carnage has got to poor Ed: hallucinating atrocities and barking obscenities, he's started to off innocents like a screen killer possessed. Because that exactly

what he is.

And that's not just the plot, but the entire point of Swede Anders Jacobsson's censor-baiting slaughter: an entire feature designed to mock his country's then-overly aggressive certification bureau. A splatire, if you will. And it works. Mostly

The frenetic fizz of outlandish bloodshed has a dizzying effect: all Dutch tilts, rapid editing and lashing of Crayola. The caffeinated killings and jocular bounce is pure Peter Jackson with additional nods (or more accurately, vigorous headshakes) to Argento, Raimi and Lynch thrown in too. But it loses its way some in the final third, where the shrill bluster ends up grating rather than entertaining. Somewhat ironically, it could do with a little editing. Any volunteers? **MILES HAMER**

RATING



DIRECTORS Various **WRITERS** Various **CAST** Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff, Claude Rains **DISTRIBUTOR** Universal Pictures **FORMAT** Blu-ray
RELEASED Out now

UNIVERSAL LEGACY COLLECTIONS

Monster Squad

While the chances are you would have caught some of Universal's original monster movies at some point, the rest of their back catalogue might have proven to be more elusive. Not any more, as the studio has stirred from the crypt the (almost complete) films of its most iconic on-screen terrors: *Dracula*, *Frankenstein's Monster*, *The Mummy* and *The Wolf Man*.

Spread across each of the four box sets are a grand total of 27 movies (22 of which are seeing Blu-ray release for the first time here), along with innumerable bonus features, with the noted likes of Kenneth Branagh, Gregory W Mank, David J Skal and Scott MacQueen giving their thoughts along the way.

While this can't claim to be a complete run-down of movies featuring the titular terrors (there

are no Hammer productions present, and the Brendan Fraser *Mummy* movies don't make the cut. Boo), this remains an astonishing repository of monochrome monster mayhem, gleefully reminiscing about a time before gore-fests ruled the roost.

Inevitably, the further the series progress, the sillier they get (*House of Frankenstein* being a prime example, along with crossovers like *Frankenstein Meets The Wolf Man*). Even so, the memories of the originals remain untarnished. Indeed, standing alongside, their reputations are only enhanced, the original *Dracula* and *Bride Of Frankenstein* especially standing the test of time.

Regardless, if you're looking for something for the monster fan in your family, you can't go wrong with one of these. **STEVE WRIGHT**

RATING



THE TRANSFIGURATION

Not for Twilight fans

Teenager Milo (Eric Ruffin) is obsessed with vampires, but the lad's no Twihard. He tells girlfriend Sophie (Chloe Levine), after she recommends he read Stephenie Meyer's take on the popular monster figure, that it sucks (For the record, we're inclined to agree with him).

His main criterion of value, to judge whether something is good or not, is fidelity to realism. Twilight blows because it's all lovey-dovey and isn't remotely realistic.

How does he know this? Because Milo happens to think that he's one of the undead. Trawling New York City for victims, he stabs them to death with a knife disguised as a pen, before supping on their life sauce. He then heads home to document his experiences against the canon of vampire cinema and literature, like he's collecting data for a show-and-tell project at school. It always seems to be the quiet ones, doesn't it?

DETAILS

DIRECTOR
Michael O'Shea

WRITER
Michael O'Shea

CAST
Eric Ruffin, Chloe Levine, Larry Fessenden, Aaron Clifton, Carter Redwood, Danny Flaherty

DISTRIBUTOR
Soda Pictures

RELEASED
Out now

FORMAT
Blu-ray, DVD, VOD

The Transfiguration belongs to a very small club of existentialist movies, beginning more or less with George A Romero's *Martin* (1977) and continuing intermittently down the years with the likes of Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction* (1995), Shunji Iwai's *Vampire* (2011) and Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2015).

Non-genre comparisons are to be made, also, to Barry Jenkins' 2017 Oscar-winner *Moonlight*, and even Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976) for their depictions of isolated figures finding their own way in life.

Director O'Shea doesn't toy with the audience. Milo is a serial killer, not a vampire. The product of a poverty-stricken neighbourhood in Queens, where social justice is unknown, Milo's story makes a powerful horror film for the Black Lives Matter era. **MARTYN CONTERIO**

RATING ★★★★★



THE VOID

Doctors and curses

Police Officer Carter (Aaron Poole) is having one hell of a night. Literally. Holed up at the local hospital with a collection of inhuman monsters, gun-toting lunatics and a murderous gang of hooded cultists outside, chances are he's already drafted his resignation for Monday.

Starting with a violent pursuit, a body engulfed in flames and a nasty bit of bedside butchery, *The Void* leaps guts first into action from the off. Following the wacky Troma larks of *Father's Day* (2011) with their first 'straight' horror, co-directors Gillespie and Kostanski conduct a symphony of hysteria and blood-letting that builds to an astonishing, chest-tightening crescendo of gore.

Re-appropriating ideas and concepts from Lucio Fulci, Stuart Gordon and Clive Barker (to name a few), it's a wonder the film manages to establish an own identity through its

DETAILS

DIRECTORS
Jeremy Gillespie & Steven Kostanski

WRITERS
Jeremy Gillespie, Steven Kostanski

CAST
Aaron Poole, Ellen Wong, Kathleen Munroe, Kenneth Welsh, Daniel Fathers, Mik Byskov, Art Hindle

DISTRIBUTOR
Lionsgate

RELEASED
Out now

FORMAT
Blu-ray, DVD

tapestry of pastiche. And while pelting gleefully through a multitude of genres and influences might hurt a lesser movie, this swaggers through with such confidence it's hard not to be bowled over.

Even a cheeky clip of Romero's 1968 seminal chiller doesn't detract from this film's impact. (Especially given that the foul-mouthed nihilism recalls more strongly the bunker-based *Day Of The Dead*.)

By turns zombie flick, mad scientist movie and occult nightmare, *The Void* is buoyed hugely by its immense score – wavering from haunting dread to nerve-shattering cacophony – and solid cast selling magnificently the script's meaty gristle.

Yes, it might ultimately end up trading some well-earned suspense for bombastic splatter in the final reel, but it's never less than an exhilarating, devilish blast. **MILES HAMER**

RATING ★★★★★



DIRECTOR: André Øvredal **WRITERS:** Ian B Goldberg, Richard Naing **CAST:** Brian Cox, Emile Hirsch, Olwen Kelly, Ophelia Lovibond **DISTRIBUTOR:** Lionsgate **FORMAT:** Blu-Ray, DVD **RELEASED:** Out now

THE AUTOPSY OF JANE DOE

Open up and say “urghh!”

Intestines. Stomach. Lungs. A heart. A rolled-up section of an ancient manuscript? There are some things pathologists expect to find inside a cadaver when they’re performing an autopsy, and others they don’t. When coroner Tommy Tilden (Brian Cox) and his son Austin (Emile Hirsch) cut open the mysterious ‘Jane Doe’, they’re not prepared for what they discover – and they’re even less ready for the horrors they’re about to unleash.

Director André Øvredal lets his characters take their time over their work at first, relying on the inherent ickiness of dissection to unsettle his audience even before the really weird stuff starts happening. He also invests a lot of time in fleshing out the relationship between the father-and-son characters, establishing both closeness and tamped-down resentment. Unfortunately, after all that careful build-up, the final act is something of a let-down. Once the mystery’s gone, the film becomes a much more conventional (and predictable) affair.

But there’s still lots to enjoy, particularly in that first hour. The meticulously designed morgue is a great setting for a horror story, and the special effects are appropriately gruesome. Special mention also has to go to the actors: Cox is great as the perpetually disappointed elder Tilden, while Hirsch hits just the right note of obedience and disrespect, and Olwen Kelly’s dead-eyed, unmoving performance as the ill-fated Jane is somehow deeply unnerving. *SARAH DOBBS*

RATING



DIRECTOR: Jim Wynorski **WRITERS:** Neil Cuthbert, Grant Morris **CAST:** Dick Durock, Heather Lockyear, Louis Jourdan **DISTRIBUTOR:** Screenbound Pictures **FORMAT:** Blu-ray **RELEASED:** 15 May

THE RETURN OF THE SWAMP THING

Marsh times

Not particularly beloved about among *Swamp Thing* fandom, upon watching this low-budget follow-up to Wes Craven’s cult 1982 original, it quickly becomes clear why this was so easily forgotten about.

While Wes Craven’s uneven original had pathos to spare, this edges away into slapstick territory, inexplicably resurrecting lead villain Dr Arcane (Louis Jourdan), making *Swamp Thing* (Dick Durock) himself winningly

articulate, and rarely giving love interest Abigail (Heather Lockyear) more to wear than short shorts and a low-cut vest.

It’s not all an anti-climatic – the human/animal hybrid Un-Men wouldn’t look out of place in a heyday David Cronenberg production – but when the effects are the best thing about a loose sequel produced on the cheap, you know you have problems. *STEVE WRIGHT*

RATING



DIRECTORS: Roxanne Benjamin, Sofia Carrillo, Karyn Kusama, St Vincent, Jovanka Vuckovic **WRITERS:** Roxanne Benjamin, Jack Ketchum, Jovanka Vuckovic **CAST:** Natalie Brown, Melanie Lynskey **DISTRIBUTOR:** Arrow **DISTRIBUTOR:** Soda Pictures **RELEASED:** Out now

XX Hell hath no fury

All-female-directed horror anthology’ shouldn’t really be a selling point in this day and age, but such is the aforementioned tagline’s lack of ubiquity, here it is.

As it happens, XX sits comfortably alongside the likes of fellow anthologies *V/H/S* and *Southbound* in its exhibition of creativity given a free reign of terror. Jovanka Vuckovic’s softly spoken opener ‘The Box’ is the best of the bunch; musician Annie ‘St Vincent’ Clark’s ‘The Birthday

Party’ rattles along suspensefully to its wry conclusion, and Karyn Kusama’s ‘Her Only Living Son’ melds *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Omen* storytelling tropes together to heartstopping effect.

The only weak link among the collection is Roxanne Benjamin’s predictable ‘Don’t Fall’, but since she produced and co-wrote this entire anthology, we’ll let her off. *STEVE WRIGHT*

RATING



DIR Brad Peyton **WRITER:** Ronnie Christensen **CAST:** Aaron Eckhart, Carice van Houten, Catalina Sandino Moreno **DISTRIBUTOR:** Universal Pictures **FORMAT:** Blu-ray, DVD **RELEASED:** Out now

INCARNATE

Possession is nine tenths of the gore

From the production team behind *The Purge* and *Insidious*, *Incarnate* is the story of a scientist, Dr Ember (Aaron Eckhart), who has the ability to enter the minds of the possessed. Somewhat predictably, the demon he's up against is dramatically linked to him – it killed his wife and child – and Ember faces a struggle to save everyone while facing his own demons from the past.

If *Incarnate* sounds like an intense watch from this description, Eckhart's endless brooding and co-star Carice van Houten's (*Game Of Thrones*' Melisandre) creepy presence give this movie pretty much the same tone throughout. Though not sparkling, the cast are perhaps the best thing about *Incarnate*, with the best scenes being the ones in which Dr Ember is tested to his limits. Eckhart is fairly charismatic, and thanks to the performance of David Mazouz (*Gotham*), the movie's stereotypical, possessed child, Cameron, doesn't come across as one-dimensional as he sounds on paper.

Unfortunately, the rest of the film isn't as multi-layered. *Incarnate* never recovers from feeling cliched from the start, and when the bigger plot points come into play – Cameron's dad Dan, an alcoholic, is killed; Ember needs a vial of blood from Felix, but Felix is possessed too – it lacks any kind of emotional punch, as the whole movie seems to leap from one dreary catastrophe to the next. This is a watchable film, but not the most memorable horror you'll see. **MARK WHITE**

RATING



DIR Sidney J Furie **WRITER:** Frank De Felitta **CAST:** Barbara Hershey, Ron Silver, David Labiosa, George Cole **DISTRIBUTOR:** Eureka Entertainment **FORMAT:** Blu-Ray **RELEASED:** 15 May

THE ENTITY

The invisible enemy

A novel adaptation based loosely on a real-life case, *The Entity* is a force in both spirit and filmmaking. Barbara Hershey plays Carla Moran, a single mother whose life is sent into tailspin following a series of sexually violent attacks.

Seeking help from disbelieving doctors and suspicious friends, she

bears both the physical and psychological scars of assault. Hershey is magnificent, and Sidney J Furie's sympathetic direction crucially places the focus squarely on the victim, rather than the perpetrator (a rarity during the Eighties slasher boom).

The pounding thrums of the attacks are brutal and uncompromising, but importantly, never lingering. They're deeply shocking and wholly unnerving yes, but this is not exploitation cinema. It's a brilliant, adult chiller. **MILES HAMER**

RATING



DIRECTOR: John Llewellyn Moxey **WRITER:** George Baxt **CAST:** Christopher Lee **DISTRIBUTOR:** Arrow **DISTRIBUTOR:** Blu-Ray, DVD **RELEASED:** Out now

THE CITY OF THE DEAD

Strife at the Witch Trials

Perhaps now more famous as the promo for Iron Maiden's only number one single, *Horror Hotel* is classically beautiful horror.

The spooky crypts, crooked graveyards and rolling mist lend it a striking 1930's Universal backlot gothic. However, thanks to the marketing decision to pretend it's American, hearing Christopher Lee's usual polished oak of an accent waver

unconvincingly across the Atlantic is deeply odd.

Sadly, the stagey tone lacks flair, and when you consider the satanic majesty of Mario Bava's similar *Black Sunday*, made in the same year, *City Of The Dead* comes across as pretty, but ultimately pretty anaemic. **MILES HAMER**

EXTRAS US cut, three commentaries, interviews, gallery, booklet, reversible sleeve.

RATING



DIRECTOR Dario Argento **WRITERS** Dario Argento, Franco Ferrini **CAST** Jennifer Connelly, Donald Pleasence, Daria Nicolodi, Tanga the chimpanzee
DISTRIBUTOR Arrow **RELEASED** Out now

PHENOMENA

Lady of the Flies

Stop us if you've heard this one before: a young American girl arrives at a prestigious European school, only to find that there's a murderer on the loose, and there's something creepy about the staff...

Yup, *Phenomena*'s basic setup sounds a lot like Dario Argento's earlier masterpiece, *Suspiria*. But *Phenomena* quickly establishes itself as something much stranger than that what is clearly drawing from. Jennifer (a pre-*Labyrinth* Jennifer Connelly) is the daughter of a movie star whose talent for communicating with insects freaks out her classmates. Instead, she befriends an entomology professor (Donald Pleasence) and his pet chimp, and with the aid of a helpful sarcophagus beetle, they set out to catch the killer.

It should be silly, but somehow Argento pulls it off. Partly that's because of his unfailing eye for striking visuals, and partly it's down to the casting of Connelly, a convincingly odd heroine who never flinches, no matter how many times she has to let bugs crawl all over her. Some of his decisions are more questionable – the use of Iron Maiden and Motörhead on the soundtrack is pretty jarring – but there's a magic to *Phenomena* that makes its absurdities irresistible.

Arrow's new 4K restoration release includes three different cuts of the film and a whole host of added extras. But it would be worth seeking out even if this was just a bare-bones release, because *Phenomena* really needs to be seen to be believed. **SARAH DOBBS**

RATING ★★★★★



DIRECTOR Juan Piquer Simón **WRITERS** Dick Randall, John Shadow
CAST Jack Taylor, Ian Sera, Christopher George, Lynda Day George
DISTRIBUTOR Arrow **FORMAT** Blu-ray, DVD **RELEASED** Out now

PIECES

The Boston jigsaw massacre

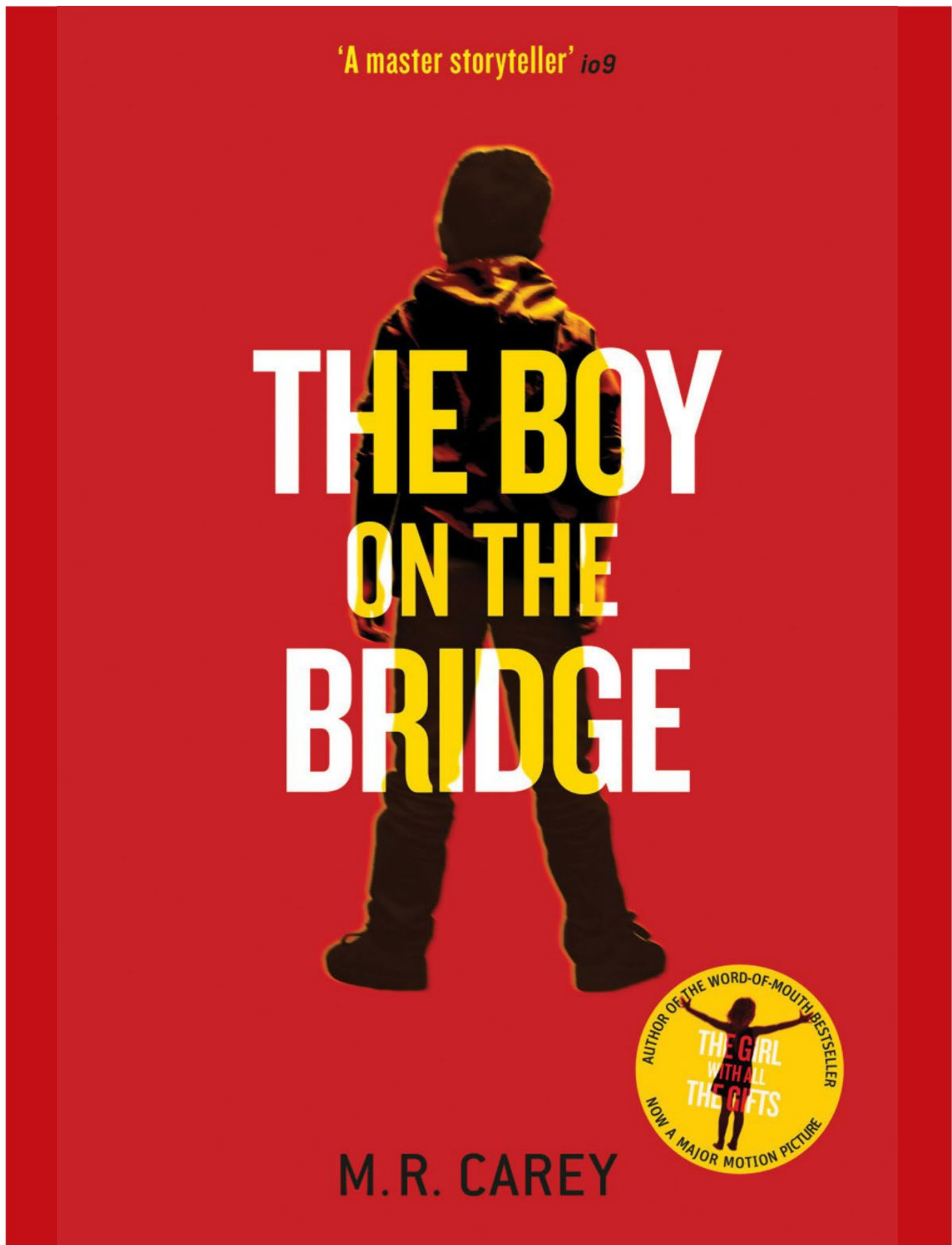
Released at the height of the slasher boom, *Pieces* uses most of the tropes of the slasher film – Freudian primal scene, tons of ridiculously gory deaths, everyday implements used as murder devices, red herrings at every turn – but never quite manages to make them gel. The killer's goal, recreating a body using pieces of their victims, never reaches even the outer limits of believability, and none of the characters are likeable enough for us to invest in. Where the film succeeds is in its death scenes.

The first two bloody murders in the film are orchestrated with very little build-up, gleefully setting the tone for the over-the-top set pieces to follow (though later kills try to create a little more tension before their magnificently gruesome pay-offs). The absolute acme of these murders (or nadir, it depends on your level of inebriation) sees the killer sharing a tiny lift with their intended victim and managing to hide a chainsaw behind their back until they decide to strike.

Ah yes, the chainsaw. A classic slasher weapon, though rather more suited to the wilds of Texas than the campus environment found here. It's bobbins, sure, but the effects team deserve much praise for their work on the victims – those wounds still look excellent all these years later in high definition. Grab some beers, call some mates, turn down the lights, and revel in the ludicrous spectacle. **MARTIN PARSONS**

EXTRAS The US cut of the film, interviews, commentary, optional new score, CD of the original score.

RATING ★★★★★



AUTHOR MR Carey
PUBLISHED Orbit Books
RELEASED Out now

THE BOY ON THE BRIDGE

Before the girl

It's a bit misleading, as Mike Carey states in these pages, that *The Boy On The Bridge* is both a prequel and sequel to *The Girl With All The Gifts*. In truth, it's only the epilogue that takes place after the monumental events of his first novel, as the bulk of this story occurs a decade before Melanie and Miss Justineau's transformative trip into the heart of a devastated London.

Providing the London-based comics scribe with his long overdue breakthrough as a novelist after his *Felix Castor* urban fantasy series was greeted with considerable praise but not overwhelming sales, *The Girl With All The Gifts* was a game-changer in more ways than one. Leading to Colm McCarthy's excellent feature film last year – for which Carey penned the screenplay – it completely reinvented the post-apocalyptic zombie drama.

Making *The Walking Dead* – where the Walkers often appear to be bystanders to the main narrative – seem mundane by comparison, *The Girl With All The Gifts* added some much-needed soul and heart to the previously somewhat tired sub-genre. By giving the gifted children like Melanie a very quick-witted intelligence, he created

protagonists – or indeed antagonists – that you could engage with, taking the reader on an evocative emotional journey. And with *The Boy On The Bridge*, he somehow succeeds in making it even more affecting.

Chronicling the voyage of mobile laboratory the Rosalind Franklin, which Melanie and company stumbled upon in the wilds of central London in *The Girl With All The Gifts*, you might think that you know where the story is heading, but Carey still has some surprises in store. And just as the first novel centred around the relationship between Melanie and Miss Justineau, this book pivots around the almost-maternal bond between Dr Samrina Khan and autistic scientist, Stephen Greaves.

“You might think you know where it's heading, but Carey has some surprises in store”

The boy on the bridge of the title, Stephen's colleagues dismissively refer to him as 'the Robot'. However, when the Rosalind Franklin's mission descends into chaos, he is the one who knows what has to be done, after striking up a tenuous understanding with the feral children, who owe as much to the anarchic teenagers of William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* as they do to Peter Pan's Lost Boys.

Paying tribute at one point to the collective visionary genius of Arthur C Clarke, Isaac Asimov, China Miéville, Neil Gaiman and Ursula Le Guinn, Carey is all too aware that he is a part of a particularly British post-apocalyptic tradition that has previously been explored by the likes of John Christopher and John Wyndham. Given his comic-book roots, there's also a knowing irony in the important role played by the former voice box of Captain Power, a *Captain Scarlet*-style action figure.

Carey has confirmed that he wanted to include some 'rewards' for those familiar with *The Girl With All The Gifts*, and he certainly achieves that in spades with the impossibly poignant final sequence. He has also hinted that he might be tempted to delve even further back in time to reveal how the breakdown came about, so here's hoping that he needs little persuasion.. **STEPHEN JEWELL**

RATING ★★★★★

AUTHORS Stephen King, Richard Chizmar
PUBLISHER Cemetery Dance Publications
OUT 30 May

GWENDY'S BUTTON BOX

The lure of destruction...

Gwendy's *Button Box* is two rare Stephen King products at once: a collaboration, and a YA novel (of sorts).

It follows the coming-of-age of (seasoned King readers may recognise this location) Castle Rock resident Gwendy Peterson, from a driven 12-year-old to an adult, who receives a mysterious box from a stranger one morning. The box has a number of buttons and two levers, each with their specific function, ranging from dispensing a diet-helping/luck-enhancing chocolate, to blowing up the entire world.

The collaboration between King and Chizmar works to such an extent that *Gwendy's Button Box* never reads like one, but instead as a single, unbroken creation. It can easily be finished in a

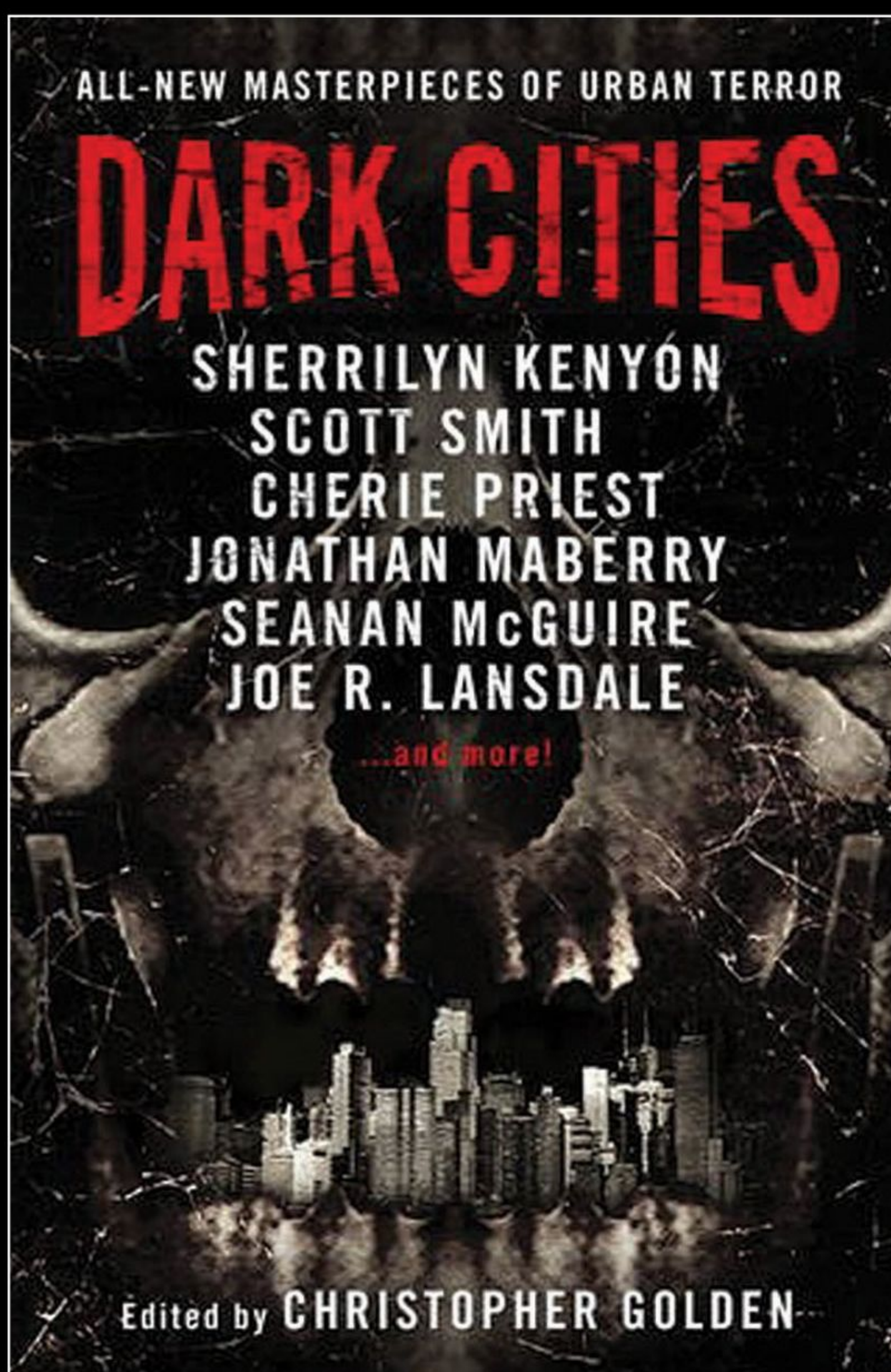
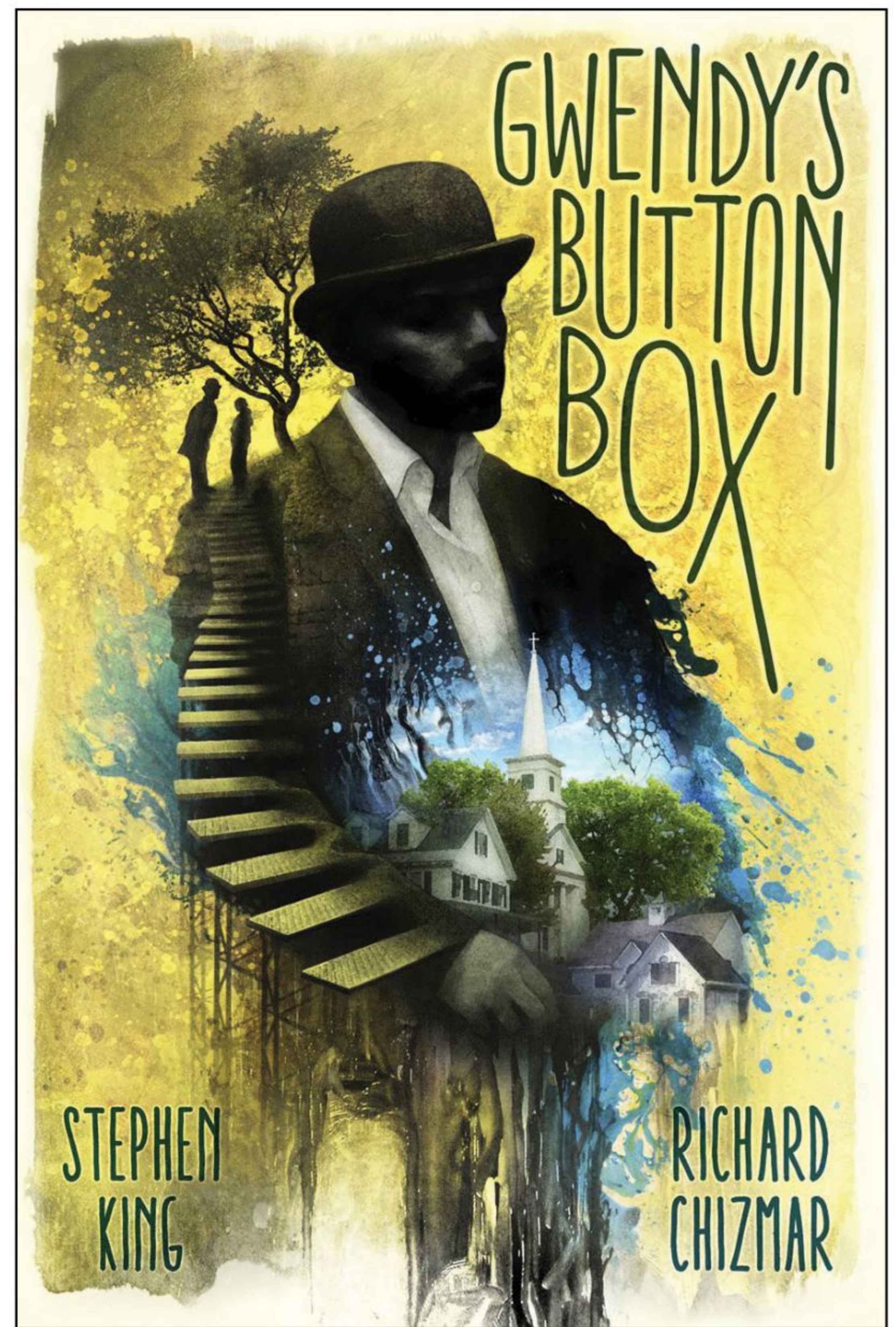
single sitting, not least because King and Chizmar use the brevity of the format to their advantage. Not a line is wasted on unnecessary digressions or padding, and what remains is a gripping, often relatable and sometimes very dark tale.

The style is suitable for teenage and young adult readers, but fittingly for a King tale, the story's scariest scenes are not the ones involving high-concept gimmickry, but rather the intimacy and emotion estranged childhood friends, and vivid (but mostly 12-rated) descriptions of physical and mental violence, suicide and even attempted rape. Over and throughout everything, the box itself seems to hover as a spectre, making it a gripping character in its own right.

Some chapters do feel abrupt, losing some potential added impact, but for the most part, *Gwendy's Button Box* is a thoroughly engrossing read, for both younger and older adults.

ERLINGUR EINARSSON

RATING ★★★★★



AUTHORS Various
PUBLISHER Titan Books
OUT 16 May

DARK CITIES

What happens there, stays

Christopher Golden, fantasy and sci-fi author, known best for novels such as *Ghost Of Albion* and *Hidden Cities*, has masterfully put together this urban horror anthology with the help of 20 of today's most talented writers. But is there something for everyone?

The tales in this book most definitely cover the generic horror clichés that we have all come to know, love and subsequently be absolutely terrified of. From horrifying hallucinations in *In 'Stone'*, to zombies consuming the living in *'We'll Always Have Paris'*, and various escapades of women in distress across a couple of the titles, this collection has it all.

However, there may be some themes that you are not so prepared for. *'The Dogs'* tests your limits with the theme of bestiality in the most graphic of ways, in the process

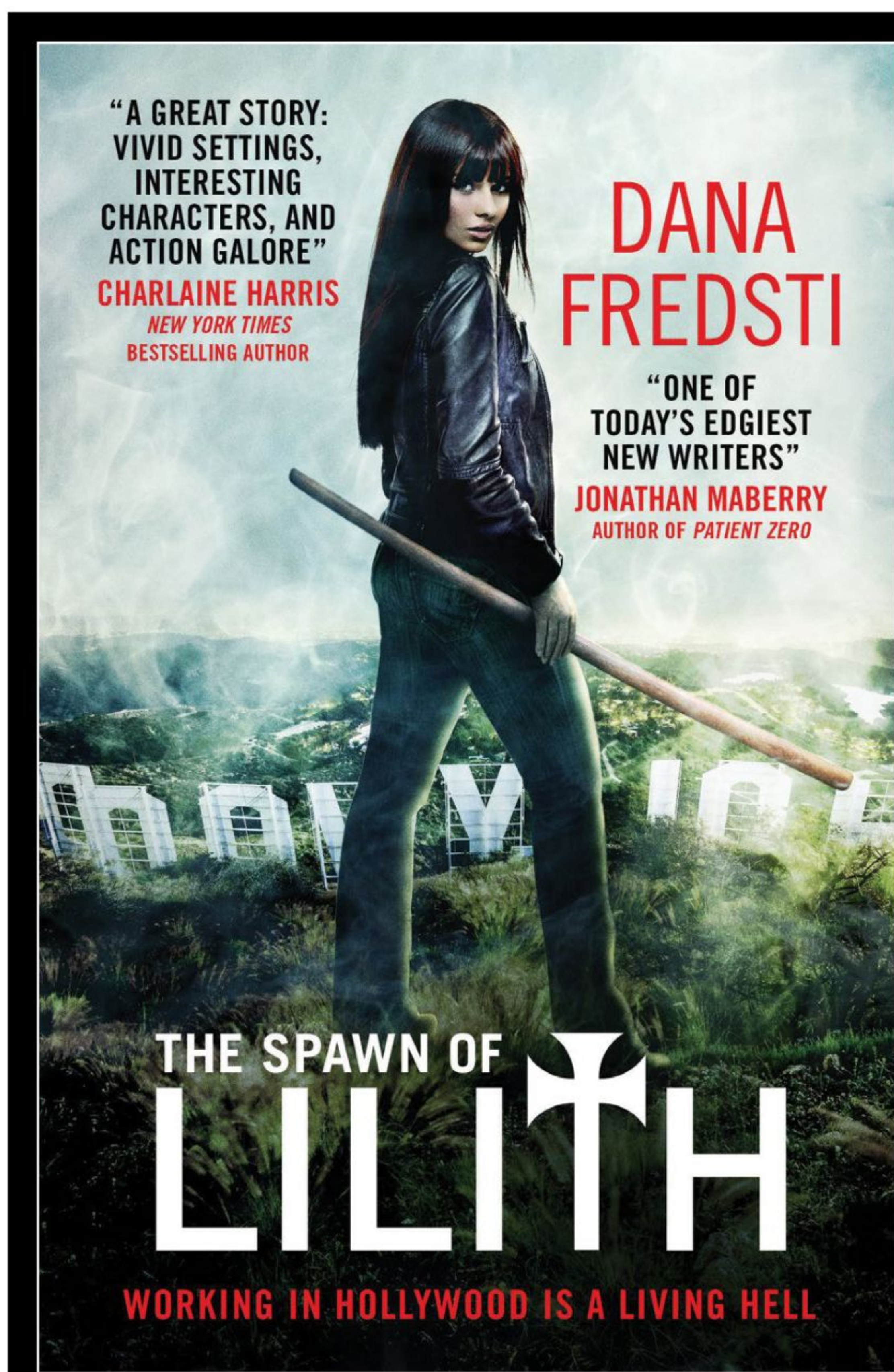
ultimately leaving you feeling more disturbed than scared.

The main redeeming quality of this selection is that not all of stories seem determined to leave you scared to be alone. *'The Way She Is With Strangers'* approaches the concept of death in a more wholesome light, and there are a number of other dark tales that also ultimately conclude positively. It's not all doom and gloom.

As you would expect, considering the title, there are also no shortage of metaphors of how the cities and their streets devour living souls. The overarching theme of this anthology concerns the loss of identity – your final realisation should be that these dark cities make people vanish, whether that is into themselves or the veins of the city.

This collection of short stories will by no means ease you into the dark boneyards or decrepit buildings of the cities with stories to tell, but it definitely won't be something you forget. **AMY BEST**

RATING ★★★★★



AUTHOR Dana Fredsti
PUBLISHER Titan Books **OUT** 20 June

THE SPAWN OF LILITH

Demons on the edge

Urban fantasy thriller *The Spawn Of Lilith* wastes no time introducing us to the rather unusual everyday life of protagonist Lee Striga. A member of Hollywood's most respected stunt company, Striga suffers a serious injury while performing a stunt in the opening chapter, so is sidelined from her regular high-risk career, and has to take small stunt and acting side jobs in low-rent films to keep from going completely stir crazy.

To avoid any chance you might think this is a dull getting-back-on-your-feet tale, writer Dana Fredsti interjects the main story with glimpses of an altogether more fantastical and sinister mystery, in the form of deadly apparitions who gradually stalk, seduce and murder their way into the main plot.

Of course, not all is as it seems with Lee, or indeed any of her companions, as we are introduced in rapid-fire style to a host supernatural beings inhabiting her world, many of which she lives with in peace and relative harmony, before it is revealed – somewhat predictably – that her fate is more, ahem, heightened, than your average stunt performer's.

Some very familiar fantasy story beats aside, Fredsti does a very solid job of keeping the reader engaged throughout, avoiding any pretentious turns toward po-faced self-importance once the plot has been turned and the real fantasy takes over. Funny and violent in equal measure, the action-heavy story also succeeds on the strength of its capable protagonist Lee, a strong female without ever becoming A Strong Female.

It's a familiar, but fun and exciting ride. There is the occasional pitfall, but overall this is a fascinating read and well worth checking out.

ERLINGUR EINARSSON

RATING ★★★★★

AUTHOR Tim Lebbon
PUBLISHER Titan Books
OUT Out now

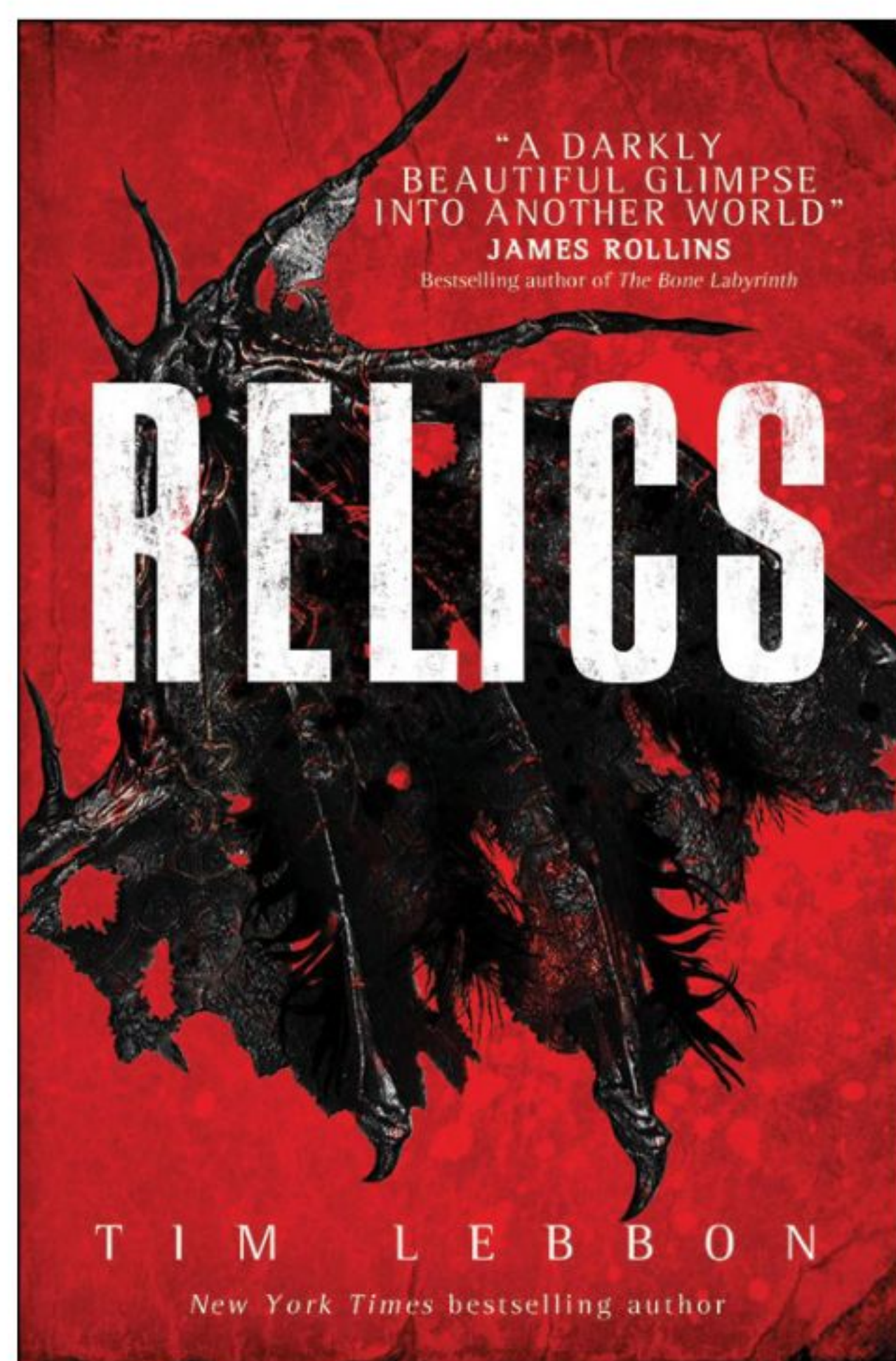
RELICS

Fairy Snuff

Relics bridges the gap between urban fantasy and horror.

While its protagonists are vanilla humans, as postgrad researcher Angela Gough looks for her missing boyfriend, it becomes clear that humans are not the only sentient creatures living in London, and there's a flourishing market in bits of dead supernatural beings, who are starting to fight back.

The problem with the book is the lack of credible characters. Angela is especially bad; she's supposed to be a regular person, yet she doesn't display a normal, human sense of fear, which makes her feel less like a real character and more like something just there to push the plot forwards. If you can look past that, the action side of things is well done. MIRIAM McDONALD



FACTBOX:

Tim Lebbon wrote the novelisation for the film adaptation of *30 Days of Night*.

RATING ★★★★★

AUTHOR Tarn Richardson
PUBLISHER Gerald Duckworth & Co
OUT 18 May

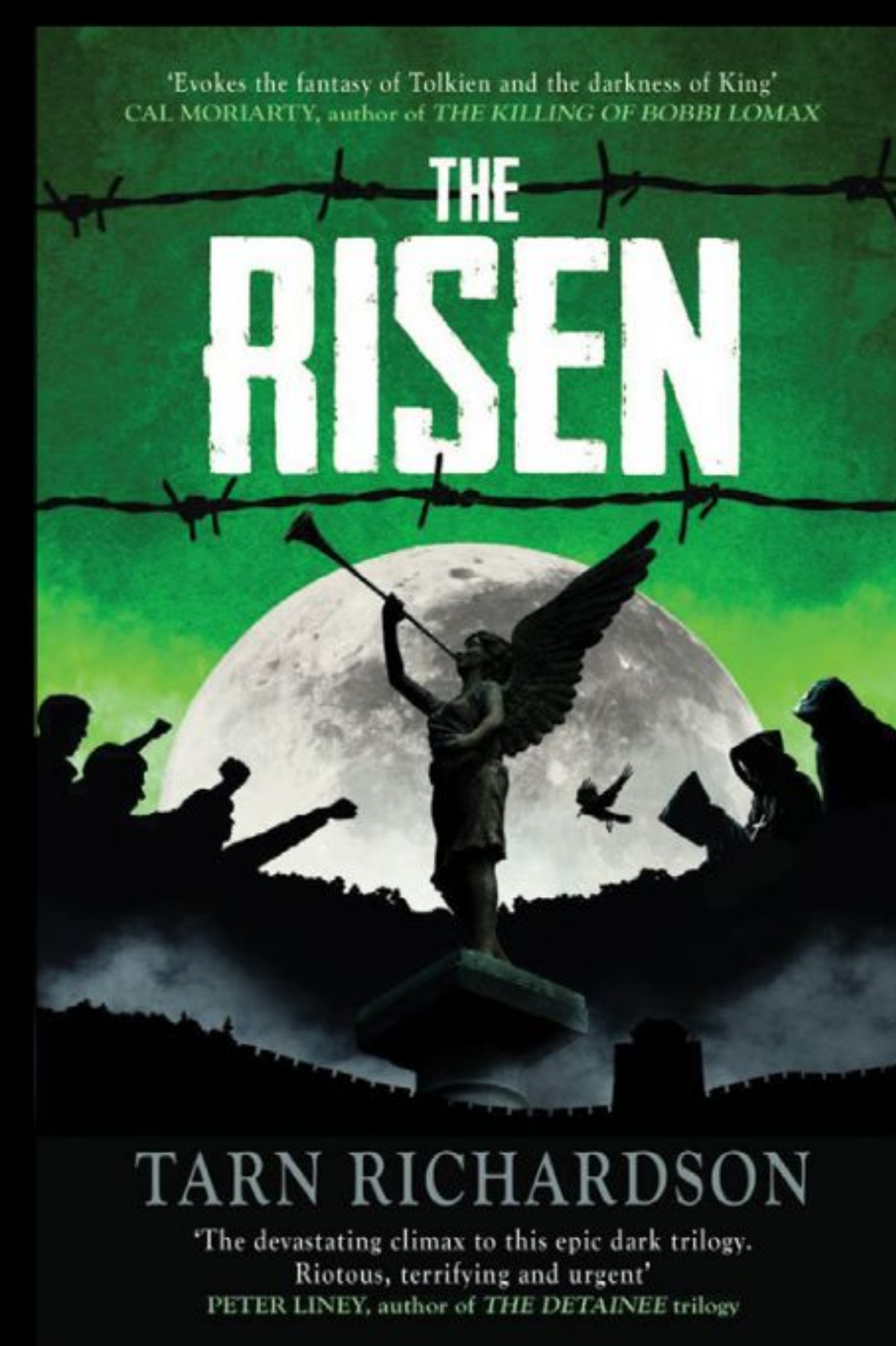
THE RISEN

Werewolves vs Inquisitors revisited

There's one way to make the most dire and darkest periods of history even more bleak: throw in a mix of supernatural creatures and morally malnourished antiheroes.

Rounding off his trilogy that sees borderline unhinged Inquisitor Poldek Tacit attempting to stave off the impending end of days amid the backdrop of WWI, author Tarn Richardson delivers with aplomb. Those who have followed the series to date will be gratified to see that he's consistent with his vision.

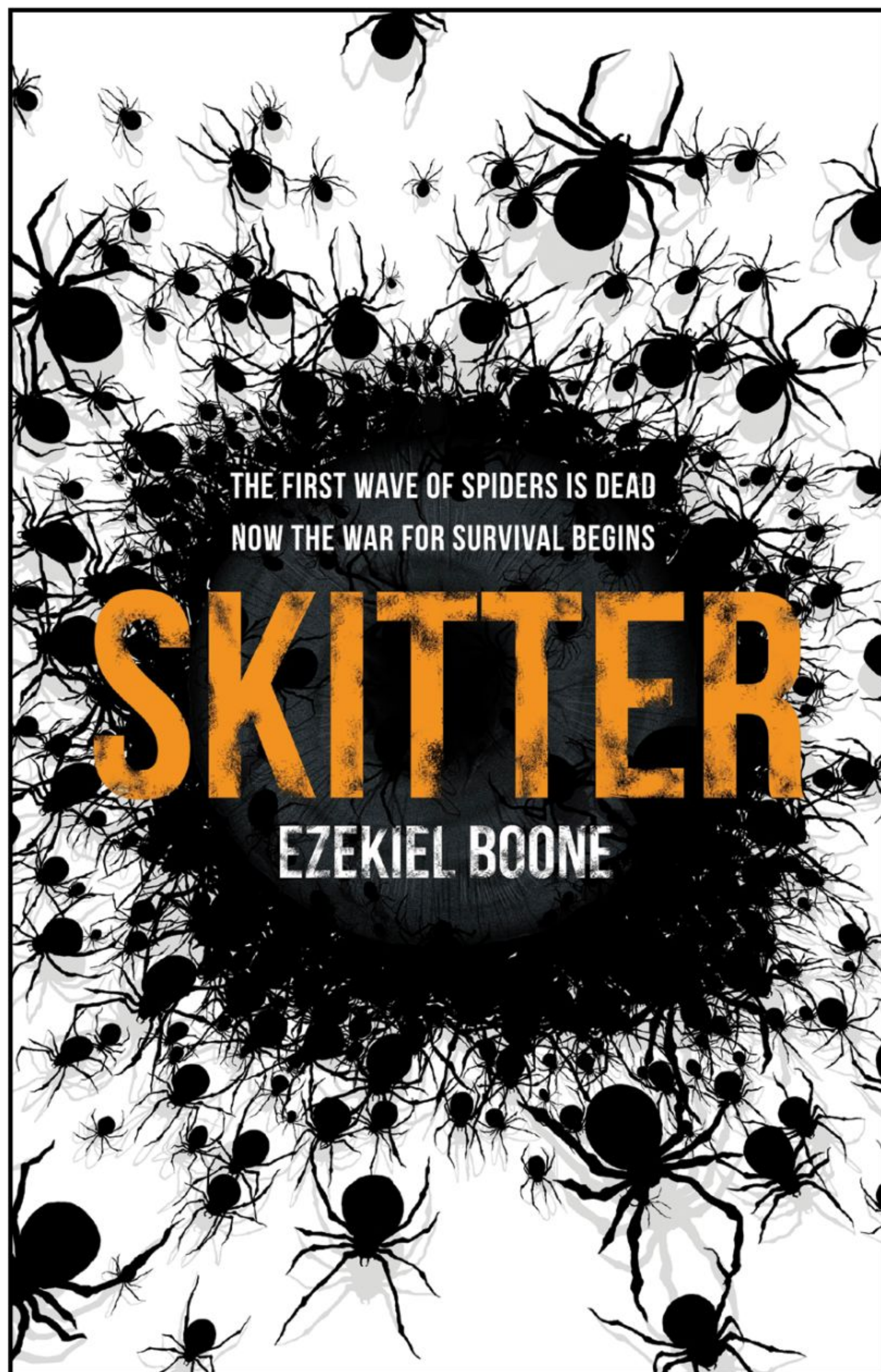
Literary mash-ups invariably slide into parody, but the subject is no laughing matter here. It is to his credit that this holds up as one of the more weighty pieces of pulp horror in recent years. STEVE WRIGHT



FACTBOX:

One of Tarn Richardson's previous jobs involved writing scripts for murder-mystery parties.

RATING ★★★★★



AUTHOR
Ezekiel
Boone
PUBLISHER
Orion
OUT
Out now

SKITTER

Web of fear

It has been reported that up to 40 per cent of Americans are scared of spiders. There's something that Ezekiel Boone taps into in *Skitter*, a novel that even makes you shiver a little with its title; and even if you're not particularly afraid of critters before you pick up this book, you'll be sure to avoid them afterwards.

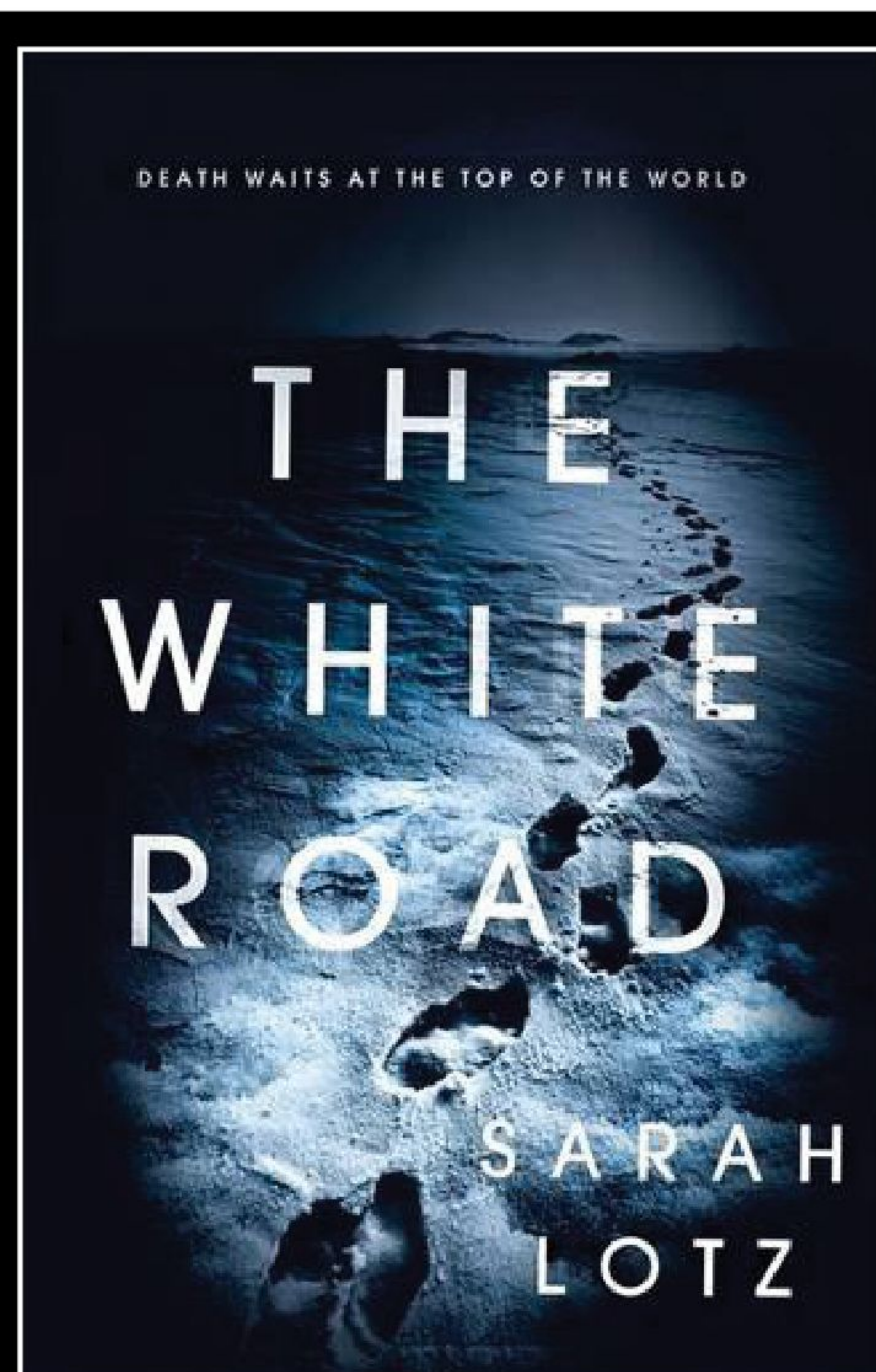
Skitter takes place during an arachnid-induced apocalypse. Giant spiders have eaten tens of millions of people, and in different corners of the globe, characters are enacting their final, most desperate plans to eradicate the swarm from the face of the Earth. The president is about to unleash the Spanish protocol, two outlaws are building a weapon in a desert, and a scientist believes things are looking up: you know early on that everything's going to

converge into one dramatic climax, and the book does not disappoint.

It's epic in scale, crossing the globe to tell the story, but the best thing about it is that it doesn't feel overly melodramatic. What could feel like a silly idea written far too seriously actually manages to find a good tone; Boone perfectly toes the line between horrifying and wryly amusing at times, all with a very down-to-earth, yet meticulously descriptive voice.

But while Boone treads a good balance with his writing, that doesn't stop *Skitter* from being an edge-of-your-seat read. It's a chilling premise executed to perfection: *Skitter* is well written, ambitious and interesting, but most of all, it's damn creepy, whether you're afraid of spiders or not. **MARK WHITE**

RATING ★★★★★



AUTHOR
Sarah Lotz
PUBLISHER
Hodder &
Stoughton
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THE WHITE ROAD

At the mountain of madness

Everest. To conquer it is to win the greatest trophy of all. But the physical and mental exertion from this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity means that it could just as easily become a nightmare. It's a dangerous – not to mention potentially lethal – mission, but will the cold kill you, or will it be that unwavering shadow, lingering in the background? This is the peril facing Simon Newman as he debuts on the mountain, hoping to make it out alive.

At its best, *The White Road* is a fine venture with plenty of claustrophobia and disturbing visuals. However, at its worst it's completely unconvincing, with thoroughly detestable characters. The lead-up to Simon's Everest climb is a morbid spelunking expedition in Wales that leads him to a handful of corpses. This cave-exploring segment proves to be the catalyst for Everest (as well as other recurring haunting

themes), but we can't help but be dubious at Simon's entire raison d'être.

Perhaps our scepticism isn't entirely fair and, granted, the journey and climb on Everest itself is constantly engaging. A real gem is that of the diary of previous Everest climber Juliet Michaels. Her entries are unsettling and full of paranoia, and we become mystified and horrified by the potential supernatural presences stalking her every move as she gets closer and closer to the peak.

Juliet's story, however, is only a small section, and the remainder of the book sandwiches it awkwardly. It's a shame, because the act of summiting Everest in *The White Road*, the prized challenge for the ultimate thrill-seeker, becomes an unfulfilled thriller.

CARRIE MOK

RATING ★★★★★

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